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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

LESLIE CHARTERIS' THE saint
in A Brand New Book-Length Novel

THE POWER ARTIST

Adapted from The Original T. V. Script

ALSO

MICHAEL AVALLONE
AVRAM DAVIDSON
STEPHEN DENTINGER

AND OTHERS

This year to which I have somehow survived permits me to look back on 40 years of professional writing, a rather long view in which I suspect that only a small minority of those who read this page can join me.

I go back to an era which—no kidding, kids—not only antedates television, but when even radio was not a serious competitor with reading. In those days, bookstalls and newsstands overflowed with periodicals mainly devoted to fiction, monthlies and weeklies, whose names are now only sentimental memories: in Britain, the *Strand, Nash's, Pearson's,* the *Windsor,* and others; in America, *Collier's, Liberty, Cosmopolitan,* the *American,* and many more. Then, to back up such prestigious titles, there were literally hundreds of the so-called "pulps", cheaply printed on rough paper and without glossy illustrations by famous artists, but packed with solid if less polished reading, and catering to every popular taste: detective pulps, western pulps, science-fiction pulps, horror pulps, love pulps—you name it. And the vital point is that despite their multitude they were nearly all prosperous.

In contrast, today, the public majority prefers to get its crime and its cowboys and its sob stories through the lazier but more vivid medium of TV, and the advertisers who play such a large part in the entertainment economy have understandably transferred the bulk of their patronage to the outlet which offers the maximum exposure. And as for the comparatively few remaining people who still recognize that literate writing and reading have something subtle to offer which the very best electronic entertainment can never provide, just as the greatest photographer can never do as much as a great painter, they mostly seem to have decided that the only thing worth reading time is a long book: the short story, which must be the foundation of any magazine, appears to have contracted the stigma of the facile television half-hour.

The fiction magazine market, under whatever aegis, is now on its last legs. All that sells on the stands, generally, is the most garish Sex, the one bait that TV cannot (yet) offer—whether slicked up as in *Playboy,* or brought down to the level of the "men's" magazines which are still retailing lush stories of Nazi torture sessions with voluptuous victims.

It is no use being bitter about a trend which now seems irreversible. My sadness today comes from remembering how much those old magazines, both "pulp" and "slick", offered me the exercise which any writer, like an athlete, needs to develop himself, and also paid me for learning. There is no such training available to a beginner with initial talent who switches quickly into profitable TV writing, where he only needs to jot a stage direction that "There is an exciting 10-second fight" and leave the rest to the director and the stunt men.. And yet, to write the Great Novel which *might* become a best-selling paperback requires an investment of time spent in possible starvation which might never pay off.

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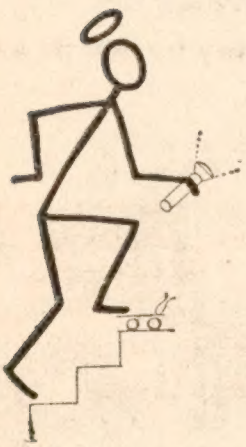

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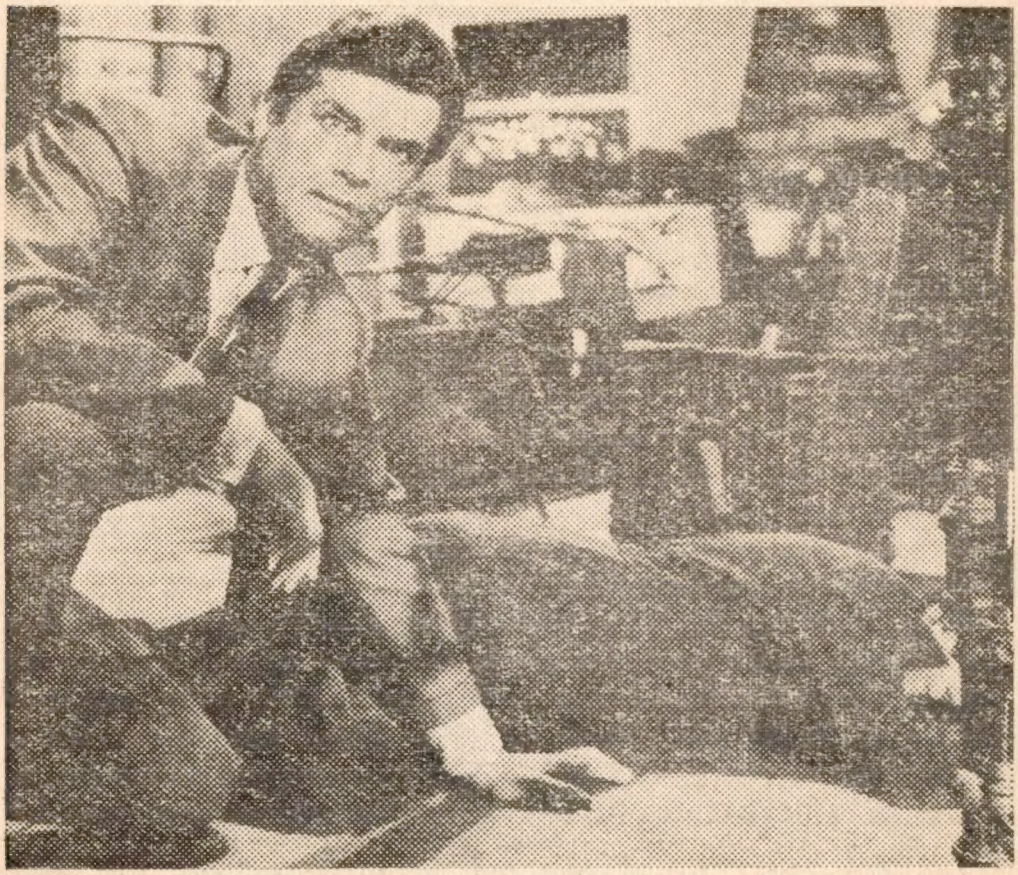
LESLIE CHARTERIS'

THE saint in

the power artist

Adapted by FLEMING LEE from
the Original Teleplay by JOHN KRUSE

The photos in this story are taken from the NEW TV series produced by ITS and now broadcast in color every Sunday evening on the NBC-TV Network.



Simon Templar has just found Perry Loudon's dead body.

Copyright 1967 by Leslie Charteris

This is another adaptation from *Television—reversing the usual process. By this time, regular readers should be familiar with the formula, which is exactly the same as with the three previous novelets we have printed: I made suggestions on the original outline, and on the resulting script; I discussed the adaptation with Fleming Lee and suggested improvements which I thought might be made in the conversion to reading matter, and I personally revised his final copy. So this is another composite product, which I did not initiate, but in which I did a considerable amount of back-seat driving.* *L C*

"Taxi, sir?"

Simon Templar, who had just closed the door of his house in Upper Berkeley Mews, stopped flat-footed and stared at the driver. He had seen the cab as he came out and assumed that it must be parked there on business with some neighbor. Upper Berkeley Mews was not the sort of street where any enterprising London cabman would wait in the hope of picking up a fare. For one to go even further and obtrude himself with a direct solicitation was simply not even plausible. And although he had come out with every intention of taking a taxi, he had not survived all those years of important buccaneering by dint of such naiveties as taking cabs which tried so crudely to thrust themselves upon him.

Relaxed but hair-triggered as a watchful leopard, he treated the driver to a lifted eyebrow that came somewhere between wariness and weariness.

"Really, chum," he protested. "Is my diaper showing? Whatever booby-trap you've got in that hack, you shouldn't insult me by being so unsubtle about it."

"You are Mr. Templar, aren't you?" said the driver. "The chap they call the Saint?"

The Saint saw no point in an empty denial.

"I have been called that."

The driver climbed down from his seat and came towards him, holding a folded piece of paper in his hand. Simon watched him come without moving, except for shifting a little more weight invisibly on to his toes. There was the faintest hint of a smile on his bronzed pirate's face which might have suggested that he was not only ready but almost hoping for the approach to turn into an attack.

"I have a message for you, sir," the man said.

"My telephone is in order, and so is the national postal service, I think," the Saint said pleasantly. "My friends are getting awfully

snobbish if they won't use either one."

"It was a man what wouldn't give his name," said the driver, who was small and ugly and cheerful-looking. "Came up to me by Piccadilly and give me this."

Simon unfolded the paper and saw typed there a name and an address.

Perry Loudon
54 *Pinter Street*
Chelsea

"Never heard of him," he said. "And it's not much of a message, either."

But in the faint electric chill which ran along his bones he knew that fate and his reputation as an outlaw who preyed on the lawless were trying to involve him again in one of those adventures which had made his life a legend.

"I was told to ask you to let me take you there, sir," the driver said. "This bloke says it would be well worth your while —something you'd never want to miss—and the fare is all paid in advance, including wherever you'd like to go afterwards." The driver grinned his ugly cheerful grin. "He was most generous with me. I told him I'd do me best."

The Saint let his blue eyes dwell thoughtfully on the other's face for a moment, and then he looked at his watch. It was six-thirty. He had no engagements for the evening, other than a cocktail party where he could show up at any time, or not at all. In such a convenient state of availability, Simon Templar could no more have passed up such a challenge than a prospector could have ignored a glittering vein of raw gold suddenly revealed by a cave-in.

"It's still a pretty vague invitation," he said. "But let's give it a whirl."

The cabby opened the door for him, and they were on their way.

"Who was this fellow who hired you?" the Saint asked.

The driver turned his head halfway and spoke over his shoulder.

"Never saw him before. Kind of young and with light hair. Well dressed. But he said that's not his name in the note."

"And that's all you know?"

"That's it. I figured you might know something about it yourself, sir."

Simon decided to ignore the implied question and sit back in

his seat and enjoy the rest of the ride. One of the secrets of happy buccaneering was the ability to relax completely when not actually engaged in combat or the chase, and to waste no energy on futile speculation. As far as the state of his nerves was concerned, the Saint might have been off to a movie instead of a rendezvous with the unknown.

"Here we are, sir. I'll wait."

They were a block and a half up a turning off the King's Road.

"Never mind," Simon said. "You've spent enough time on this job."

He stepped out on to the sidewalk, and the cab pulled away. The Saint stood for a moment to get the feel of the neighborhood. The long summer evening was still bright and the only distinct sign of the hour was the smell of cooking food, heavily dominated by garlic, which apparently is favored by artists throughout the civilized world. And this Chelsea district was definitely populated by artists of all kinds—mostly, Simon was afraid, by the kinds whose masterworks exist only in dreams.

A miniskirted girl hurried past him with an outsized portfolio clutched to her bosom. A longhaired creature of indeterminate gender strode across the little-travelled street with a pile of thin volumes in his, her, or its hands. A gaunt bearded type in blue jeans and sleeveless T-shirt trudged along the gutter with a bunch of bananas in one hand and a guitar under his arm; Simon wondered if the bananas were to eat or for smoking.

Number 54 Pinter Street was very much like the other numbers. It was a narrow, two-storied house with a sharply peaked roof, shoulder to shoulder with its neighbors on either side. Simon went up the shallow flight of steps which led to the front door and read the card tacked above the bell. On it, in a strong and ornate hand, was penned the name Perry Loudon.

The Saint, whose experience with the doorbells of possible enemies had not instilled in him any great trust, pressed the button with one end of his rolled newspaper. There was no sound, as far as he could hear, and when a second try brought no response he pushed open the door, which was already several inches ajar. From upstairs he could hear heavy thumping sounds. As he stepped into the hallway the thumping stopped and was replaced by a faint hissing noise.

"Hullo!" Simon called. "Anybody home?"

"Come on up, whoever you are," was the reply, in deep mas-

culine tones which had no particular quality of friendliness.

The hissing continued as the Saint climbed the stairs. It originated in the room to the right of the landing.

Looking in, he at first had the impression that he had come on some monstrous junk yard. The entire space was cluttered with tangles of metal and glass—some of them taller than Simon's head, a few no larger than a potato. A door, slightly ajar, led on to the flat kitchen roof at the rear of the house. A stool and straight chair were the only furniture besides a heavy table. In among the sculptures was a black-maned apparition in blue goggles and a leather apron. In his hairy strong hand was the source of the hissing sound—a welder's torch spurting blue flame.

He looked up from his work, which consisted of fusing a new contortion of steel to one of the larger metal constructions, and turned his opaque goggles on the Saint. His stocky body seemed to undergo a shift from relaxed indifference to tense defensiveness. He shut off the welding torch.

"I told you never to come back here," he snarled.

The Saint stood in the doorway for a moment, and then strolled casually into the forest of drooled and twisted metal.

"That's odd," he said. "I was under the impression I'd just been asked to call."

The sculptor made an empty threatening gesture with his dead torch and then flung it on the floor.

"No playing games any more," he said furiously. "Get out! Beat it! And take your bloody portrait with you!"

He turned to the nearest wall and yanked down a foot-square plaque. Then he came toward the Saint and threw it to him. There was something like a distorted human face faintly discernible in the tangle of dark steel.

"Am I supposed to recognize this?" Simon asked. "Or is this just your peculiar way of trying to make a sale?"

"It's on the back—just so you don't forget."

The Saint turned over the plaque. There was lettering cut into the metal.

PORTRAIT OF A RAT
THE DOUBLE CROSSING
SIMON TEMPLAR

The sculptor had already gone back to his welding. Simon had reached the limit of his patience, and he took the metal plaque

and threw it to the floor so close to the other man's feet that only his excellent aim prevented a double amputation. The artist whirled angrily and shut off his torch again.

"That's enough," he said, crouching into a fighting stance. "You're asking for it."

Simon was ready for anything, though to an unastute observer he might have seemed as nonchalant as a bored spectator at a flower show.

"I'm asking for a little information," he said. "Are you Perry Loudon?"

"Who the hell do you think I am—Michelangelo?"

"Not for a minute," said the Saint candidly.

"Out!" yelled Loudon.

"I'll be only too glad to leave," Simon replied, "but I'd like to get a few things straight first"

"They're straight now. If you think you can run off with Janet and then wander back in here whenever you feel like it, you deserve the worst I can give you."

Loudon picked up a heavy wooden mallet from a jumble of his tools.

"I've never heard of Janet," Simon said, standing his ground, "And I've never heard of you either."

The directness of those denials got through to Loudon and momentarily held him where he was.

"Are you telling me you aren't Simon Templar?" he asked.

"I'm telling you I *am* Simon Templar, and that I've never seen you before in my life, unless somebody I used to know is hiding behind those goggles and a false name."

Loudon clutched the mallet more tightly.

"You're the only liar in this room, Templar. And the only cheat, too. You ran away with my girl two days ago, and now you've got the nerve to come back and joke about it. What kind of a fool do you think I am?"

He lunged at the Saint, who sidestepped and sent his attacker stumbling against one of the metal sculptures.

"A clumsy one," Simon replied to the question.

As Loudon got ready to charge again, Simon looked for room to maneuver and put his back to the partly open door which led to the outside roof. When the sculptor came at him, the Saint broke the downward swing of the mallet with a karate chop to Loudon's arm. The mallet flew through the air and bounced from the wall. Simon blended his defense into a whirling motion

that caught Loudon off balance and brought his back up hard against the door jamb.

He was temporarily stunned, and the Saint used his advantage to jerk the goggles from the sculptor's eyes.

"Before this goes any further," he said, "take a good look."

Loudon blinked and for a moment was so shaken by what he saw that he could not speak.

"You're. . .*not* Simon Templar," he finally said incredulously. "But you're so much. . ."

Loudon's expression changed. His words were choked off in a sudden constriction of his throat. His body arched and he dropped forward onto his knees. Then he sprawled heavily at Simon's feet.

A long, slender chisel protruded from the center of his back.

The sculptor's falling revealed two men on the flat roof just outside the door. They stepped toward the Saint, each pointing a pistol at him. They were large and solemn, and dressed in immaculate suits, like clerks at a men's shop, or undertaker's helpers. They both wore gloves. The only thing which really distinguished them from one another was the color of their hair: the head of the one on the left was light brown; the other was pitch black and wavy. The face of the black-haired one was oily and looked red in the setting sun.

"Not a sound," he said. "Raise your hands."

"Turn around," said the other quietly.

The manner was professional. Neither man showed any trace of haste or nervousness, though they both kept wary eyes on possible points of danger—the roof behind them, the door from Perry Loudon's studio to the hall and staircase.

Simon did not obey at once, not only because he was reluctant to expose his back to a couple of characters who had already demonstrated such a pronouncedly unpleasant way of treating that part of the human anatomy, but also because he wanted to memorize the faces as thoroughly as possible for future reference—if there was any future in store for him. He was defenseless against two guns in skilled hands, both held safely out of his reach.

"Turn around," the brown-haired one repeated.

The Saint turned, facing into the studio, and the crimson-orange light that fell directly through the door over his shoulders made the metal statuary glow as if it were heated to the melting point.

He braced himself for the jolting stab just below his shoulder blades, which would mean that one man at least had come with-

in reach, if he could still turn and get him. Then the glowing steel sculpture seemed to explode, the metal fracturing through the whole universe in a meteor shower of sparks which drifted down into total blackness.

But in that warped bit of time between the explosion and the darkness the Saint had time to know one thing; he had not been stabbed or shot; he had been struck on the head.

2

He woke up with a smell of blood in his nose and what felt like a painful throbbing split from the center of his forehead to the nape of his neck. The Saint had the invaluable gift of being able to adapt immediately to the most extreme circumstances, and in a situation which might leave another man groggy and confused for several minutes he would find his faculties operating at peak levels within a few seconds.

So Simon did not lie groaning uselessly, or wondering whether he was waking up in his own bed or not. With the first stirring of consciousness he recalled vividly what had happened at the roof doorway of Perry Loudon's studio, and his first thought was to determine whether he had been tied up or not.

He was relieved to find that he was free, and that the tentative movement of his hands did not bring on a harsh warning from one of the men who had slugged him—or worse, another blow to his head. He was even more relieved to find, on gingerly examination, that his skull had not, in fact, been cracked down the center like a melon bounced onto the highway from the back of a truck, but that the sensation was illusory, and his cranium was as solid as ever.

His next move was to sit up and look around the studio. It was only then that he realized he was not lying where he had fallen, but that he had been moved directly alongside Perry Loudon, who now clutched in his fingers the mallet he had dropped earlier. The sculptor was definitely dead, but the blood which had stained the back of his shirt was still wet and sticky. The chisel still jutted from a point near the junction of his ribs and his spine, expertly placed to penetrate the heart. There was no sign of the experts who had placed it there.

The Saint did not need to ponder at length to grasp the possible implications of what had happened. He had been brought here for some purpose, manifestly not by Perry Loudon, and

manifestly not just so that somebody could enjoy the simple pleasure of bopping him in the head. It seemed to him that he was being treated to a close-up view of the biggest frame in London outside the Tate Gallery.

He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and carefully smeared any fingerprints which his assailants might have put on the chisel by wrapping his hand around it after he was knocked unconscious. Then he got to his feet, smoothed back his dark hair and brushed off his clothes, and went across the crowded studio—to one of the windows which looked out from the front of the house down on to the street.

Whether it was intuition or uncanny timing born of long experience, he somehow knew exactly what he would see when he looked out of the window. The accuracy of his prescience sent a brief chill down his spine. A police car was just pulling up in front of Loudon's house.

The Saint turned quickly, checking to see that he had not inadvertently dropped anything, and hurried back across the room to the open door which led to the roof, from which the two mysterious attackers had come. It was at the back of the house, facing similar kitchen roofs across a narrow alleyway. To the left was the solid and unscalable brick wall of a taller building next door. To the right, however, the flat ground-floor roof adjoined with no more than a gutter break the identical roof of the house next door. A head-high picket fence had been constructed there to give a certain amount of privacy, since both Loudon and his neighbor—unlike the tenants of the houses across the alley—apparently used their kitchen roofs as sun decks. But the fence was not a real barrier, since it did not reach quite to the back of the roof. There was a space of several inches which would give a man easy footing as he swung around the end of the fence from one roof to the next. From there Simon imagined he could find some way to continue until he was far enough from the police to descend and walk inconspicuously away.

But he had to reckon with more thoroughness on the part of the Metropolitan Police than he had hoped they would think necessary. As he approached the fence and got a glimpse of the ground below, he saw the blue helmets of two constables bobbing up the alley toward the back door of Loudon's house. There was no way to get around the fence to the next roof without moving into their field of view—and to be discovered making an acrobatic escape from the scene of the crime would have a prima facie

implication of guilt.

Without a moment of hesitation, Simon dashed back into Loudon's studio. He had noticed before that there was a trapdoor in the ceiling. It was one of those types which, when pulled down with a hanging cord, automatically lowers a kind of folding stairway—as the Saint verified to his relief when he tested it.

Down at the front of the house the police had begun knocking at the door—patiently, at first.

Simon quickly lifted the body from the floor and saw that the blood which had not been absorbed by the fabric of the shirt had pooled in the leather apron. He managed to clasp the apron tightly enough as he backed up the ladder carrying Loudon that not even one drop splattered down on the bare floor.

There was no time, though, for any further precautions, once he had pulled his burden up into the attic. The police had given up knocking, and he could hear their steps inside the house on the ground floor. He did not actually climb down the ladder. He slid from the stuffy heat of the attic down the handrails and sent the apparatus up through the ceiling again with a single strong shove. Then, as he heard steps ascending the stairs, he snatched Loudon's goggles from the floor, sprinted to the welding machine, and ignited the torch with the flint and steel device lying on the fuel cylinders.

When the official visitors arrived, he was leaning intently over one of Loudon's unfinished sculptures, sending dribbles of metal down one of the irregular twisted outcroppings.

"Mr. Loudon?"

Simon pretended not to hear the voice, and went on with his doodling.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Loudon."

The Saint straightened up and turned his blue goggles toward the stout figure in the hall doorway.

"If you're the plumber," he said, "the stopped-up drain is in the. . ."

The tone of the voice which interrupted him was considerably less polite than it had been a moment before.

"What're you doing in that getup, Templar?"

Simon raised the goggles from his eyes and peered at the abundant form of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal of Scotland Yard.

The detective looked overheated and damp, but triumphant. This was one of the few occasions in the long history of his frustrating contacts with Simon Templar when he might reasonably

have expected his appearance to come as a complete surprise. For that reason, if for no other, the Saint showed no surprise at all.

"Oh, hullo, Claud," he said offhandedly. "I thought you were the plumber."

Teal made an effort not to swell or change color. He had often dreamed of imitating the perfect self-possession of his legendary nemesis, but when the moment of truth came he always found himself wanting.

"Where is Perry Loudon?" he blared.

The Saint looked around the room.

"He must have popped out. I've been so absorbed in my work that I hardly notice what's happening around me."

"When did he leave?" Teal persisted doggedly.

"Now, Claud, I just told you I didn't notice. That's why you've never been anything but a plodding gumshoe all your dreamy life. You don't remember things people tell you."

"Why didn't I see him leave?"

Simon laughed almost incredulously.

"Claud," he said, "now you're really asking for it."

"If you were with Loudon here, you must have some idea where he went."

"Probably to get some beer. He ran out, and I believe he said something about being thirsty a few minutes ago. This torch, and all this heat, you know."

"I think you're lying."

"Dear, old skeptic, you can't blame me for what goes on in that thing you call your brain. Look around. You won't find a single can of beer in this room."

Teal did not look around the room for beer. Instead he turned to the door and called down the stairs.

"Did you men find him?"

"No, sir."

The fat detective, his hands jammed in his jacket pockets, which had developed capacious bulges to match his jowls because of months and possibly years of such mistreatment, devoted his attention to the Saint again.

"I have reason to believe that something has happened to Perry Loudon."

"What reason?" asked Simon.

"A phone call."

"Who from?"

"Uh. . .anonymous."

The Saint shook his head.

"Really, Claud Eustace, for such an old bloodhound you certainly are easy to fool. I suppose tomorrow you'll be out trying to find a left-handed screwdriver."

"The caller claimed to be one of the neighbors. Said you and this sculptor were fighting, and they heard somebody scream."

"Loudon has a lot of weirdo friends," said Simon. "Probably one of them was just playing a joke."

"And how do you explain the fact that you're here?" the detective asked.

The Saint cocked his head thoughtfully as he considered the question.

"How do I explain the fact that I'm here," he repeated. "Claud, you're getting almost metaphysical in your declining years."

Teal opened his mouth, but Simon waved him lightly into continued silence and sat back to rest his hip gracefully on top of one of Loudon's more smoothly rounded creations.

"We could start with *cogito ergo sum,* I suppose. Or maybe 'existence precedes essence' if Sartre is more up your alley—although that's a blind alley I'd rather stay out of. Get it, Claud? *No Exit.* Or does your taste run to modern drama?"

Inspector Teal was standing there stoically like a silent film comedian being showered with whipped cream.

"Why are you in Loudon's house?" he asked.

"I've taken up sculpting. You know what a sedentary life I've always led. I figured a little creative activity might give me something to do between meals and solving crimes for you."

"So you claim you're taking lessons from Loudon?"

The Saint winked approvingly atnd raised a finger.

"Astute, Claud. You're coming right along."

"And you claim you weren't fighting with him?"

Simon shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. If that was a neighbor who called, he probably heard this."

The Saint picked up a hammer and began banging on one of the sculptures until Teal held his hands over his ears and backed toward the door. A uniformed policeman appeared behind him and Simon stopped his noise in order to hear the report which was obviously about to be made.

"I spoke to an old lady across the street, sir," the policeman

said. "She's been by her window all afternoon. She saw one fellow come in, but no one came out."

Teal looked at the Saint.

"Well, Templar, how do you explain that?"

"Possibly he went out that door," Simon answered, nodding toward the roof.

"Where does it go?"

"Claud, must you depend on me for *all* your information? I'm glad to help whenever I can, but there are limits. I don't know where that door goes to because I don't live here. I only take lessons."

Teal motioned to the constable to follow him.

"Let's have a look."

Simon followed the two men out on the roof. If the old lady's report was accurate, it aroused his curiosity as to where Loudon's murderers had gone after leaving the studio. There seemed only one way—around the fence which divided the two roofs, and from there to points unknown.

Inspector Teal looked at the single route a man might plausibly take in leaving Loudon's kitchen roof, and then he looked at the Saint.

"Are you seriously telling me a man going out for beer would climb around that fence?"

"Who can tell about artists? Maybe it's a short cut to the nearest pub."

Simon went to the fence and facing the end of it swung around on to the next roof.

"See?" he said. "Nothing to it."

Teal followed in the Saint's steps, but failed to take into account the much greater expanse of his own belly. As he tried to ease himself after Simon, allowing as little as possible of his capacious anatomy to sag out over empty space, his paunch scooped against the fence and his jacket hung on some splinters. The pickets were quivering and swaying dangerously under that unaccustomed strain, and Simon on one side and the constable on the other each grasped one of the detective's elbows and eased him to safety on the far side of the fence.

Teal did not make any comment, and Simon considered it tactful under the circumstances not to make any either.

"Wait for us," Teal said to the policeman. "We'll have a look over here."

"Just what is it we're looking for?" Simon asked.

"I don't think I need to answer that," Teal said gruffly.

"I don't think you could," Simon said. "I think you're just scared to go back around that fence again."

He strolled across the roof, which was exactly like Loudon's, except that it was furnished with a folding canvas lounge chair. The next roof was accessible beyond it.

The detective looked at him, his face scrunched into a purpling mask of exasperation.

"Saint, I've had enough from you."

"That's good," Simon drawled. "So now maybe you'll stop picking on me."

"I know you're up to something," Teal grumbled, "and this time I'll see you get what you deserve."

"A seat in the heavenly choir?" suggested the Saint seraphically.

Teal lumbered over to the half-open door which led from the roof to the inside of the house. The sun was just disappearing behind the chimneypots in the west, and the room—which corresponded in its position to Loudon's studio—was so dim that it was impossible to see any details of what was inside.

Teal knocked on the door, which swung a little wider open under his knuckles.

"I doubt that he cut down through somebody else's home even if he did come this way," said the Saint. "He probably went on to the next roof. If you'd looked over the edge back there, you'd've seen a sort of iron ladder, probably meant for a fire escape, running down to the alley."

Teal knocked again.

"The whole idea of people running around roofs looking for beer is idiotic. I'm going to see if anybody in here heard the noise of you fighting with Loudon."

Simon gave a martyred sign and did not answer. Neither did the inhabitants—if there were any—of the house at whose back door the detective was knocking.

Teal stepped inside and the Saint followed him and looked around. The place was furnished with all the discomforts of a one-room flat: chairs, tables, washstand, hot plate, bookshelves, divan beds—jumbled together with easels, paints, piles of cotton wadding, and rolls of paper and plastic. The divan beds were opened and appeared to be occupied. No heads were visible, but the sheets were bulging.

Teal knocked on the wall and coughed loudly, but still there

was no response. Simon thought he was going to leave then, but the fat detective's eye fell on an arm which projected stiffly and entirely unnaturally from beneath the sheets on the other side of the first bed. He turned to look at the Saint and received a noncommittal shrug.

"Hullo, there," Teal said, and now he could not keep a tremor of incipient triumph out of his voice.

It was obvious from the peculiar static quality of the human arm he was addressing that he would be very unlikely ever to receive any answer from its owner. Quickly he stepped forward and whipped away the sheet.

Lying on the bed was a lifesized male dummy dressed in a T-shirt and blue jeans—so realistic that in the very dim light it could easily have been mistaken momentarily for a real person.

"What kind of a game is this?" Teal muttered wrathfully.

He stepped around to the next bed and hauled the sheet off it in the same cavalier fashion.

There was only two important differences between the first figure and the next one he uncovered. The second one was a female. And it was alive.

3

The girl's face was half covered by a black sleeping mask, and rubber plugs were visible in her ears. She was young and blonde, and she wore thin cotton pajamas, that clung with understandable affection to a distractingly pneumatic torso and what must have been the longest pair of legs in Chelsea.

When she had groped the mask away from her eyes she blinked at Teal in the semi-darkness and screamed.

The detective executed something like a comic dance routine as he stumbled backward to the door, holding both hands palm outward in front of his face as if he could both ward off her piercing squeal and hold it inside the room.

"I'm from Scotland Yard!" he babbled desperately. "There's no need to be alarmed!"

His swift retreat and the fact that he stopped in the doorway with Simon instead of fleeing in a guilty manner across the rooftop, apparently reassured the girl. She looked more angry than frightened as she tore the plugs from her ears.

"Well?" she said. "What was it? The excuse?"

"I'm. . .I'm most terribly sorry," stammered Teal. "Really I had

no idea."

"Is this the way you get your kicks—poking around people's beds?"

"I'm a police officer. From Scotland Yard."

The girl tilted back her head.

"Ha!" she said derisively. "No wonder the country's got problems."

Simon laughed in the background.

"And who are you?" she called at him.

"Just one of the Inspector's perennial suspects."

Teal extended his identification card to the girl, who looked at it with total disbelief.

"I've seen things like that for sale in joke shops, she remarked. "So get lost."

"He really is a police officer," said the Saint. "Can't you tell? Look at his feet."

The girl obligingly leaned to the side of her bed, turned on a lamp, and inspected the inspector's shoes.

"They're the right size," she agreed. "Now what do we all do—go and arrest somebody?"

"My name is Teal. . ."

"Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal," Simon elaborated brightly. "The pride of Scotland Yard. And I am Simon Templar."

Teal tried to silence him with a glare that would have stopped a herd of stampeding buffalo in their tracks.

"We're investigating. . .that is *I* am investigating a complaint from one of the neighbors."

"About what?" inquired the girl sweetly. "Men tramping around over the roofs?"

"About a fight. Have you heard or seen anything unusual in the past half hour or forty-five minutes?"

"*Have* I? Two men broke into my studio, stripped the bedclothes off me, trotted out the wackiest excuse, and. . ."

The detective reddened.

"Yes. Well. . . I'm very sorry, Miss. . ."

"Lane," she said. "Cassie Lane. And that's George."

She indicated the dummy in the other bed, and Teal was so flustered that he half-nodded to it before he caught himself.

"That's Caspar," Cassie Lane continued.

She pointed to another dummy, a very lifelike one, propped in a sitting position in the corner beyond where she was lying. It was dressed in Bermuda shorts, a straw hat, and sandals. Si-

mon moved in for a closer look.

"These are—er—friends of yours?" he asked.

"My best friends," said Cassie Lane, looking fondly at Caspar. "In fact, my only real friends."

Teal looked more disturbed than ever. He backed towards the roof.

"Well, Miss Lane, I appreciate your cooperation."

The girl looked at Simon with an expression which showed that she found him much more potentially sympathetic than the detective.

"Don't think I'm a complete nut," she said. "I'm an artist. I make these dummies."

"Must be fascinating work," said the Saint. "Has Scotland Yard taken an option on all you output?"

"You're nice," she said. "Get rid of your fat friend, and I'll tell you about it."

"I might do that."

"Come along, Templar," snarled Teal from the doorway.

"You mean I don't even get a parking ticket for sleeping in my own bed?" the girl said with feigned relief.

"You're on your own property," answered the Saint.

"Really? I thought it was becoming a public highway."

She and Simon grinned at one another. Teal closed the door and led the way back across the roof toward Loudon's house. There was still an orange glow in the western sky, but lights had been turned on in some of the houses whose backs were visible up and down the alley. Teal stripped the wrapper from a stick of chewing gum and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Constable!" the Saint called when they had come to the fence, "Time to moor the blimp."

Teal, in seething eagerness to prove his agility, almost ended his long war against the Saint by dropping on to his head in the lane below. But once again Simon and the policeman combined their efforts to prolong his life. As he was about to topple backward from the end of the fence they caught his arms on either side and whipped him from the edge of disaster to a sitting position on the late Perry Loudon's roof. He assumed the position with such force and lack of grace that the whole adjacent area of the building trembled, and Inspector Teal swallowed his chewing gum.

As he coughed and choked, Simon helpfully pounded his back until the breathing passages were unclogged again, and Teal

jerked petulantly away and wiped his streaming tears with a handkerchief. The constable, looked solemnly off at a cluster of television antennae in the middle distance.

"That was a narrow escape, Claud," said the Saint with great concern. "Almost done in by a wedge of Spearmint. Maybe you really should take up something safe like plumbing. It pays better than this daredevil stuff, too, and when senility isn't too far up the road a man has to think of practical considerations."

"Clark!" Teal roared to the constable. "See what Perth has found out, if anything, and report back up here as fast as possible."

As the policeman hurried off, Teal ignored his helpfully offered hand and laboriously clambered to his feet.

"Irrational loss of temper with subordinates," clucked Simon. "Another sign of deterioration."

Teal ignored that bit of analysis and strode into the sculptor's studio. He turned on the light and looked around at the grotesque metal shapes.

"If you want to learn to make these things, you're welcome to it," he growled. "But I don't believe a word you've said, and I particularly don't think that Loudon went out for beer. He'd have been back long before this."

"Claud, isn't this getting a little bit silly? We've been squabbling here for at least half an hour over whether some artist went out for beer or not, while all over London citizens are getting robbed, murdered, and otherwise misused as a direct consequence of your neglect of your proper duties."

The detective opened his mouth, but the Saint went on.

"It might occur to anybody with more brain than a policeman that an eccentric like Loudon can pop out for beer one minute, disappear, and show up three weeks later with a suntan and a performing troupe of African elephants." Simon walked toward the door. "Now, as far as I'm concerned I've had enough of this nonsense, and I'd like to finish up my sculpting session so I can go to dinner."

Teal's pink jowls quivered with the strangulated earthquake that they were containing. He reached for another stick of chewing gum, thought better of it, and stepped heavily toward the door.

It was then that Simon saw a small drop of dark reddish liquid splatter against the metallic intricacies of one of Loudon's sculptures. His eye darted up to confirm his suspicion of the source, and he saw another drop forming for the plunge at one corner

of the trapdoor. Fortunately the open work in the interior of the sculpture, which resembled a large family of snakes in the midst of a festive reunion, had dispersed the blood which had already fallen and kept it from making a puddle on the floor.

There had never been a time in his life when the Saint was more anxious for Chief Inspector Teal to complete an exit.

"I'll check back on this," the latter said. "If anything *has* happened to this fellow Loudon you'll hear from me."

Another globule of blood gathered enough weight to fall from the corner of the trapdoor and splash into the tortured recesses of the sculpture. Simon interposed himself between Teal and that unpleasant sight and manufactured a story which he hoped would speed the detective's departure.

"I'm sure I'll hear from you, Claud, and just to show how cooperative I am I'll tell you I've just remembered a pub Loudon mentioned. The Crown, I think it was."

"Where is that?"

"Now how many times have I reminded you that I can't do *everything* for you?" Simon answered a little irritably. I don't know where this one is, but there must be dozens of them in London. You've only got to go through them methodically, starting in this neighborhood."

Any gratitude that Teal might have wished to express for that information had to be contained while the constable he had sent away a few minutes before came trotting excitedly up the stairs.

"Found something there, sir," he said. "Down on the front hall table among some bills and letters."

Teal turned to the head of the stairs to take the small square of paper the constable handed him, and the Saint used the opportunity to join them outside the door of the studio.

Looking over Teal's shoulder he had the sudden peculiar sensation that he was living in a dream, and that he would do best to wrench himself to full consciousness before things got any worse. For in the stout detective's hand was a snapshot of Simon Templar and Perry Loudon on a river bank, looking in a holiday mood with a gorgeous doll in a minimal bikini standing between them.

4

It was not a very good picture. Whoever had taken it had adjusted the lens slightly off focus—a common failing of shot-snappers, but in this case possibly done for good reason. Because

Simon positively did not recognize the doll, much as he would have liked to, and he knew he had never seen Perry Loudon before that afternoon; and yet there he appeared to be posing with what it would seem obvious—in one case at least—to call bosom friends. Therefore a certain fuzziness of focus might have been designed to make a passable facsimile of the Saint less easily detectable for the impersonation that it had to be.

Chief Inspector Teal, however, was not conditioned to pause to perceive such subtleties. He turned with such an expression of fiendish elation distorting his pudgy face that any sharp movie mogul would have signed him on the spot for a series of horror films, and thrust the photograph under Simon's nose. The Saint removed it to a more suitable distance and simply stood there looking Teal in the eye.

"Well?" whopped the detective. "What do you call this?"

"That's something called a photograph, Claud," the Saint explained kindly. "I doubt that you could ever grasp the complexities of the process, but it basically consists of an image formed by light on a sensitive emulsion."

"Do you still claim you're just a student of Loudon's?"

"Before I answer that, is it against the law to be more than a student of Loudon's?"

"Just give me a straight answer," Teal barked.

"No," said the Saint blithely.

Teal's momentary exultation began to ripen again into an apoplectic tint of carmine.

"What did you say?"

"I said no," the Saint repeated. "Your hearing's going too, Claud. "No, it is not against the law to be more than a student of Loudon's."

"You'll cooperate or you'll find yourself in serious trouble," the detective said.

He apparently intended his words to carry weight and dignity, but they came out in the form of a loud squeak which caused the two plainclothesmen waiting in the ground floor hall to peer puzzledly up the stairs.

"Now, Claud," the Saint said in a very low voice, "I don't want to embarrass you in front of your minions."

He extended a long forefinger and pushed it lightly into the center of Teal's stomach.

"I'm not a cruel man," he continued. "But I'm a just man, particularly where my own rights are concerned. The fact that I

claim a few rights that the yahoos have gladly given up for their bread and circuses is to my own credit, I think, whether you like it or not. And one of the rights I claim is to be where I please when I please without some insufferable bureaucratic slob shuffling up and asking me a lot of impertinent questions."

The steely finger jabbed more vehemenly into Teal's midriff and forced him to retreat a half step in order to maintain his balance. The Saint's voice was a little louder, and had developed a razor edge.

"Of all the routine complaint calls you get every day," he said, "you find it necessary to trot out half the strength of Scotland Yard on the *one* that mentions my name. Somebody drops a hammer in the building where I'm taking a lesson in the noble art of Phideas and Michelangelo, and suddenly it's a riot. Some beatnik goes around the corner for a beer and suddenly he's the biggest case since Dreyfus. You haven't found a trace of a crime or a body or even a drop of blood, but you have the gall to threaten me with all kinds of sinister consequences if I don't 'co-operate'—which I suppose means confessing to something I haven't done."

Now the Saint's prods to Teal's belly were more frequent and powerful, and they forced little puffs of air from between the detective's lips.

"Do you know what that is, Claud Eustace? That's harassment and persecution. And if you carry it any further I'm going to see that you're kicked so far downstairs at Scotland Yard that you'll need a rocket to get up to the basement."

Teal struggled for several long seconds to muster some reply. He started to raise the photograph above waist level as some sort of banner under which to continue the battle, but he seemed to realize its uselessness. The solid ground on which he had thought he was standing had turned into a quicksand and he knew it.

He turned away from Simon and started quickly down the stairs, tucking the picture into his jacket pocket as he went.

"That's stealing, Claud," the Saint reminded him politely.

Teal, without a pause in his trudging descent, pulled the picture out of his pocket again and handed it over his shoulder to the constable who was following him. When they were at the bottom of the stairs the constable took the picture and put it on the table from which it had been taken.

"Bye-bye," Simon called cheerily. "If I'm still here when Loudon comes home, I'll tell him you're looking for him."

Teal did not look around. He marched sullenly out of the house to the dark street, and the last of the three men to follow him shut the door quietly behind them.

The Saint hurried down the stairs, bolted the door on the inside, and took the steps two at a time on his return trip to Loudon's studio. He closed the door to the roof but could not lock it because there was no key in sight. A glance through the front window showed the police car driving away.

Simon went to the cord which hung from the overhead trapdoor, and a moment later the ladder had descended to the floor. He was halfway up it when the door from the roof opened and a voice called, "Hold it!"

The fact that it was a female voice, and one that Simon recognized, kept him from doing anything more drastic than turning his head with bland unconcern. Cassie Lane was standing just inside the studio, no longer dressed in her pajamas but in jeans and a man's white shirt, holding up her hand as if she could freeze the Saint with a gesture.

"I knew it!" she cried. "The moment I laid eyes on you! You're ideal."

"I agree," said Simon, "but would you mind admiring me later? I'm busy."

"Absolutely perfect. How could I leave?"

"Do you want something specific?" he asked her.

He was painfully aware that only her excitement had kept her from noticing the bloodstains on the trapdoor and the corner of its opening.

"I want *you!*" she announced dramatically.

"I'm flattered. Maybe I can return the compliment when I get through with my work here."

Cassie Lane's enthusiasm was apparently unquenchable.

"Lithe!" she declaimed. "Fantastically balanced! Coordination like a cat. Would you mind stripping to the waist?"

Simon took a step down the ladder and regarded her more interestedly.

"No," he said. "Would you?"

When she tried to meet the blue eyes which gazed at her with just a trace of mockery from the impossibly handsome face, she faltered for the first time.

"I want you for a model," she said earnestly.

He would have agreed to pose as Laocoon with a hungry boa constrictor to get rid of her at that moment.

"That could be arranged, I guess, but right now I'm terribly busy. I'll come over when I've finished."

"I'll just watch. Go right ahead. I like to study my models in motion for hours before I hit on the right pose for them."

Cassie came to him, looking up into his face and putting her hand on his shoe.

"Please," she begged. "Couldn't I just watch?"

Suddenly she looked vaguely puzzled and glanced down at her hand. Splotched on the white skin of its back was a drop of blood.

"Don't scream," said Simon.

He managed to drop from the ladder and get some fingers over her mouth before any loud sounds emerged.

"Promise not to scream?" he said. "I'll explain this completely."

She nodded and he tentatively freed her head, still holding her body close to his.

"Oh, dear," she breathed. "Is that. . .blood?"

"I'm afraid so."

"You've murdered somebody? You've murdered Perry. Is that it? No. . .don't tell me. I don't want to know. I'd rather not know anything."

She put her hands over her ears, and Simon waited patiently until she was ready to listen again.

"I haven't murdered anybody," he said. "I. . ."

"Are you going to murder me?" she asked breathlessly, but with reasonable calm. "You can tell me that. I might as well know. I mean, that's something that can't get me involved."

"It can get you pretty uninvolved, in fact," said the Saint.

Cassie Lane pointed up the ladder toward the dark attic, from which another drop of blood had just fallen on to one of the rungs of the ladder.

"Somebody murdered somebody," she said feebly. "Is that right?"

"Yes. Perry Loudon was murdered—this afternoon. I hope you weren't. . ."

She shook her head.

"No. I hardly knew him. I hardly know anybody. I'm not going to feel sorry. I'm just going to. . ."

"Going to what?"

"Faint."

He had loosened his grip, but his arms were still around her, so that it was no effort at all to ease her into a wooden chair

nearby. She showed no signs of waking up immediately, so Simon used the welcome silence to put his thoughts in order.

Several things seemed obvious or at least highly probable. He was the victim of an elaborate effort to stick him with a murder charge. Only the fact that he had awakened so soon from the blow on his head had kept him from being discovered with his hand all but gripping the chisel which had killed Perry Loudon. Teal's caller had mentioned the Saint's name specifically. Even Loudon had been prepared for Simon's visit, the apparent photograph seemed to affirm their acquaintanceship, and the bikini babe in the photo was probably the apex of a triangle which was supposed to provide the motive for murder.

The plot was almost insanely refined. The next obvious question was, who would want to do such a thing, and who would be capable of such a baroque way of doing it? Not many of the criminals on whom the Saint had preyed and from whose spoils he had built his fortune remained alive or free after their encounters with him, but a few did, and there could be others who would like to see him eliminated as a matter of simple prudence, in the same way that people get typhoid shots before they find they have actually contracted the disease. And the chances of a major felon meeting his doom at the hands of the Saint were considerably greater than his chances of dying of old age.

But there was no clue as yet to who was behind the scheme, and for the moment there were more pressing problems.

The mere fact that the frame-up had not resulted in Simon's immediate arrest on suspicion of murder was hardly enough cause for uninhibited jubilation. His temporary freedom was due only to Scotland Yard's failure to demonstrate that there actually *had* been a murder. Now, in addition to the perpetrators of the crime, who would be most willing to confirm Perry Loudon's demise to the police, there was Cassie Lane, a direct witness to the *corpus delicti*.

The combination of circumstances meant that physical escape from the scene would be no more than a delaying action. Simon would have to do a lot more than that. He would have to keep the police mystified as long as possible simultaneously tracking down the real murderers. It was a challenge that only a man with the ice-cold nerves and resilient resourcefulness of the Saint could hope to meet.

There was a telephone half buried under some rubble in one corner of the room. Simon located it because of the numbers

scrawled in pen, pencil, and crayon all over the wall in its vicinity. He brushed away the debris and dialed a number he had carried in his head for years—the home of an acquaintance who, in the old days of the Saint's more piratical exploits, had always been available for the clandestine transporation of bulky objects, and purportedly still was.

"Bert," he said to the gravel-crusher voice which answered. "This is Simon Templar. I hope your rates haven't gone up too much, because I have a job for you."

Bert, after expressing his pleasure at renewing an old friendship, wanted to reminisce, but Simon had to cut him off.

"It's a rush job," he said. "Large, heavy metal statue to be moved to your warehouse right away. Yes, I'm aware that it's dinner time, but I can't wait. Can you get a couple of men over here right away—54 Pinter Street?"

Bert said that it would be possible, but only at great effort and fantastic expense.

"Yes," said Simon. "All right. I figured on that. Overtime. Naturally. Don't bother to explain it all to me, just get over here double quick. If anybody wants to know what you're doing, tell them it's an order put in by Perry Loudon some time ago."

Simon repeated the address and hung up. Cassie Lane's eyelids had started to flutter during the last part of his conversation, and now she sat up in her chair and looked at him with dazed turquoise eyes.

"Good morning," said the Saint.

The girl stood up, supporting herself dizzily with one hand on the chair.

"I'll see you again some time," she said.

"Probably not," Simon replied. "The police will question you, you'll tell them you saw me with Perry Loudon's body, and they'll take me away and hang me while the real murderers go free."

She looked at him miserably.

"I wouldn't tell," she said. "Couldn't we just. . .forget the whole thing?"

"You can, I suppose. Meanwhile I'll be tracked down like a mad dog. While you're hiding away over there in your nest staying uninvolved the forces of evil will triumph, and it'll all be your fault."

The corners of her pretty mouth turned down and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, no," she wailed. "How can you say that? I haven't done a thing!"

"You've *seen*," said the Saint a little ominously. "You're involved whether you like it or not. It's just lucky for you that I'm not a killer, or I'd have to eliminate you and dispose of your poor crushed young body along with this one up here."

He gestured toward the trapdoor.

"You really didn't kill Perry, did you?" she asked.

She was wiping away her tears, apparently trying to resign herself to her fate.

"No," Simon said, "I didn't. But two men did kill him, while I was here. They hit me on the head and tried to make it seem I'd had a fight with Loudon that ended with my stabbing him in the back. The fact is, I'd never seen him before. That's as much as I can tell you because I have to hurry."

He was standing in front of her, and he took both her hands in his. She was like a small frightened animal, and he knew, without modesty, that there was a magnetism and restrained strength in his touch which would calm and reassure her more than any number of words.

"Now," he said quietly. "Will you help me?"

She stared at him as if mesmerized.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Good."

He steered her toward the door to the roof.

"You want me to leave?" she asked.

"Just long enough to get your paints ready to use. And if you have some plaster of Paris, would you please mix some?"

"What for?" she asked weakly.

"I'll show you in a minute."

The Saint went to the head-high piece of sculpture on which Loudon had been working just before he was killed. Cassie Lane watched as he put on the goggles, lit the welding torch, and turned the thin javelin-point of blue flame onto the metal, cutting slowly through it.

"Oh!" said Cassie Lane, with sudden comprehension.

Then she ran off across the roof toward her own flat.

5

When Bert the mover (who had never been reputed to possess a surname) arrived with two husky cohorts, Simon was putting

the finishing touches to the rewelded seams he had made in the side of Loudon's last creation. It was fairly obvious that the giant metal beehive had been opened up and closed again, but one of the reasons for Bert's long success at his vocation was his total lack of inquisitiveness. He was an iron-grey man with the neck of a rhinocerus and the handshake of a grappling hook.

"Good to see you," he rumbled to Simon.

He looked at Cassie Lane, who was sitting benumbed on a stool, and pretended not to have noticed her.

"Is this it?" he asked, nodding toward the sculpture.

"Yes," Simon answered. "And remember—it's Perry Loudon who asked to have it moved."

"Right."

One of Bert's men trundled in a dolly, the sculpture was heaved on to it, and within a minute it was on its way downstairs.

The Saint took a deep breath of satisfaction and stretched his arms. Cassie Lane burst into tears.

"I could *kill* you," she sobbed.

"We've had enough of that here today."

"You've ruined everything!" she went on. "My life—I had it so well worked out. Now I'm involved in your beastly affairs right up to my neck."

"Well, you can't expect to live your whole life in an airtight box with a couple of make-believe boy friends."

"I could *try!* I was working very well until you came along."

"Never mind. If we're caught, I'll ask my friend Inspector Teal to put you in a quiet private cell. Solitary confinement. Wouldn't that be ducky?"

The thought failed to comfort her, so Simon stood behind her and rubbed her shoulders and found once more that physical contact had a much better effect than verbal persuasion. She stopped blubbering and was soon breathing with something not terribly unlike contentment.

"Just try to calm down," he murmured. "I'll be out of here in a minute."

"You're not going to *leave* me here?" the girl cried.

Simon went over to the telephone and began scanning the numbers which Loudon had noted on the wall.

"It's up to you. I'd enjoy your company if you'd like to come along with me."

She got up and looked over his shoulder. He was scrutinizing one of the barely legible pencil scrawls.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm not sure yet. Look."

He indicated the name and number he had been inspecting. *"Simon,"* it said. *"BEL3344."*

"That's you," Cassie exclaimed.

"One of me," said Simon. "I think I'll take advantage of this rare opportunity to talk to myself while I'm in two different places."

He took up the receiver and began dialing the number.

"You think somebody actually made Perry Loudon think it was you?" Cassie said.

"Exactly. There's even a photograph downstairs with someone in it who looks remarkably like me."

There was an answer at the other end of the line.

"Hullo?"

"Is Simon Templar there, please?" asked the Saint.

"Simon Templar speaking."

"I'm a friend of a friend of yours, and I have an important message that has to be delivered in person. Could you meet me somewhere, or give me your address?"

There was a moment of hesitation.

"Who is this please?"

The voice resembled the Saint's, but only roughly. No one who knew him well would have been fooled by it.

"I'll explain when I see you," Simon said.

It was more a feeling than anything else, but abruptly he knew that the man who had been speaking to him was no longer there. He waited a few seconds and there was only silence.

"Will you meet me, then?" he said.

The emptiness was finally broken by a single click as the receiver at the other end of the connection was put back into its cradle.

"Did he hang up?" Cassie asked.

"He did. Or somebody did."

Simon was dialing again.

"Are you calling back?"

"No. Trying to get the address that goes with that number. You can't get it from information, but I've got a friend in the right department."

"Then are you going there?"

"Yes," said Simon.

"May I come with you?"

"Getting brave?"

The girl shrugged.

"Just resigned, I guess."

"That's a sign of progress, anyway."

When Simon had obtained the information he wanted, which turned out to be an address in Kensington, he led Cassie down the stairs and out on to the sidewalk, leaving Perry Loudon's studio as nearly as possible as it had been before the murder.

"See over there?" said the Saint. "That dark blue car parked down the block? That's one of Chief Inspector Teal's sleuths."

"How can you tell?"

"It's a special gift I have, from years of abstinence and yoga."

"I don't really understand what you are exactly," Cassie said.

"A lot of people have that problem."

"What'll he think of me coming down from Perry's place with you?"

"Does it matter? Come to think of it, it's an advantage. You could easily account for what I've been doing up there all this time." He gave her an appraising look. "*Very* easily."

Suddenly, before she could reply, the girl realized that he was taking her directly over to the dark blue car that he had pointed out.

"What are you doing?" she gasped, clutching his hand.

"Having fun."

The Saint sauntered up to the driver's window and leaned down to look in. The single occupant of the car, a thirtyish man with black beetling brows, was sitting embarrassedly upright, looking straight ahead.

"Hullo there, Longbottom," Simon hailed him cheerfully. "Going our way?"

Longbottom—which actually was the name of this particular specimen of Teal's personnel—could no longer ignore the Saint's proximity. He turned to look at the lean pirateer's face with a kind of humiliated indignation.

"I don't think I know you," he said.

"Oh, come now, Longbottom, I never forget a face—particularly a funny one. How about giving the lady and me a lift? I don't have my car along, and I'm sure we're all headed for the same destination. This way you won't run any risk of losing us in the traffic."

Without waiting for a reply, Simon opened the back door and handed Cassie in, then slipped in beside her.

"Longbottom, this is Miss Lane, one of London's outstanding artists. Miss Lane, Mr. Longbottom of Scotland Yard."

"How do you do?" said Cassie.

"Fine," mumbled the plain-clothes man. "But honestly, I can't—"

"Of course you can," said the Saint, leaning back in his seat and crossing his long legs. "You're assigned to follow me, and I'm making it as easy for you as possible. But neither I nor Miss Lane will tell on you. Isn't that right?"

"Of course," responded Cassie.

For the first time she not only did not look depressed, but actually showed signs of enjoying herself. Longbottom, on the other hand, showed distinct signs of not enjoying himself at all, but he had been thrown so off balance by the Saint's gambit that he apparently could think of nothing better to do than go along with it. After all, it could not be disputed that he was faithfully carrying out his orders, albeit in a somewhat unorthodox manner. But the fact that he would arrive at the Saint's next stop a couple of feet ahead of the Saint instead of half a block behind him seemed a small enough technicality to be overlooked for the time being.

"Fortyfour Newkirk Road," Simon said. "You can drop us around the nearest corner, if you don't want to be too obviously with us."

Longbottom did not say a word during the short drive, which took them through a northward zigzag to a small square somewhere behind Barker's. He stopped there without parking or shutting off the engine of his car.

"Just around the next turning on the left," he said, without looking around.

He seemed to be trying out a theory that not looking at his passengers would somehow nullify their presence.

Simon stepped out and helped Cassie to join him, folded his long frame down to speak to the glum driver.

"We'll be back again shortly. Have a cigarette or something if you like, but don't leave the car."

Longbottom made no audible comment, and the Saint and Cassie strolled the few yards to Newkirk Road.

"Just what are you going to say to this man who's been doubling for you?" asked the girl.

"It depends a bit on what he says to me. He's probably no professional crook. If you wanted to find an imposter, where would you go?"

Cassie thought for a second.

"I'd look in the Actors' Directory."

"Right. If we. . ."

They had just rounded the corner, and Simon kept on walking, holding Cassie's arm, but his voice was cut off by the inescapable premonition that leapt to his mind from what he saw ahead.

About halfway along the block a small crowd had gathered, and two policemen were holding open a path from the front of one of the apartment buildings—someone's venerable town house converted to flats—to the open rear doors of an ambulance. The cause of the assembly lay on a stretcher beside the steps of the building, and one of the ambulance attendants was working over him with oxygen equipment.

The Saint made his way through the gawkers with Cassie Lane clinging to his hand. He arrived at the stretcher in time to see the ambulance attendant make a hopeless gesture and shut down his apparatus.

"What happened?" Simon asked one of the bystanders.

"Chap fell from a top window. Suicide, they reckon."

Although the Saint was partially prepared for what he would see when the breathing mask was taken away from the dead man's face, the sight still came as a shock. While the man was not his double, the likeness was good enough to pass at a casual glance—or to provide a snapshot that would be identifiable as Simon Templar with the help of a slightly out of focus camera.

Cassie gasped as she looked, and Simon turned to see Longbottom sharing her astonishment. The police car was parked at the corner, and the plain clothes man had left it to come and join the spectators. A minute later the ambulance doors closed off the last view of the body, and the crowd began reluctantly to disperse.

"What do you make of that?" Longbottom asked. And without waiting for an answer he went on: "Is that the man you came here to see?"

"You're getting warm, chum," said the Saint. "Keep guessing."

Longbottom, who was a short-legged man, had to break into a semi-canter in order to keep up with the subject of his interrogation. Simon was striding easily toward the opposite end of the block from the one where they had arrived, and Cassie was skipping and jumping along at his side.

"You know this chap?" the detective asked. "Why were you coming here to see him?"

The intersecting street led to Kensington High Street, and traffic was plentiful. Simon, as he hailed an approaching cab, gave Longbottom a pitying look.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I give interviews only on Tuesdays and Fridays. But I *am* glad we came here together—you'll be able to testify that my twin had already taken his dive when I got here, so I couldn't have pushed him."

Longbottom was still searching for an appropriate reply when Simon helped Cassie into the cab and started to follow her himself.

"You might tell Chief Inspector Teal," he said, "that even though you lost sight of Miss Lane and me as we were hurrying off to our supper, your intuition tells you we'll be available back at her flat after a while. If there's any faith at all left in the world, that should eliminate the necessity of general alarms and roadblocks. Buckingham Palace," he told the driver.

He slid into the taxi and locked the door behind him as Longbottom cast vainly about for another cab in which to follow and then sprinted frantically back toward his official car. Long before he could have reached it, Simon and Cassie had been swept away in the stream of traffic.

Cassie, with a doubtful glance at the glass partition between them and the driver, whispered in Simon's ear.

"They killed that man so he couldn't talk, didn't they?"

The Saint nodded.

"That seems pretty likely. We'll discuss that later. Right now, since I don't think they're really expecting me at the Palace we'd better think of some other place to have dinner. Do you eat, or do you subsist on the fumes of glue and paint?"

Cassie smiled.

"I eat. Ordinarily I don't get up quite this early, and I have brunch around midnight, but since you and that policeman woke me up—"

Simon's head tilted back a fraction as he looked at her with enthralled incredulity.

"Brunch around midnight?" he repeated.

"Of course. I sleep all day and have my day at night while everybody else is sleeping. It's lovely like that. No crowds, no traffic, no interruptions. . ."

"No nothing," concluded Simon. "Just you and George and Caspar sailing away in a pea green dream-world."

This time her smile was positively dazzling.

"You *do* understand, don't you?"

Simon's expression achieved a kind of determined tolerance.

"Well," he said. "Let's get you some breakfast, then."

He glanced down at her bare feet, at her jeans and wrinkled white shirt.

"Oh, don't mind the way I'm dressed," she said. "I know a perfect spot."

Cassie's perfect spot turned out to be the nearest member of one of those mass-production food chains which have lately riddled London like an invasion of termites in the beams of a noble house. Simon almost ended his relationship with Cassie at first sight of the steamy windows emblazoned with chartreuse and purple announcements of the day's special treats. Within, at a vinyl-topped table lavishly arrayed with the smeared remnants of the previous diners' stew, their every whim was as thoroughly ignored as possible by a continuously loping waitress whose genetic heritage appeared to have stemmed from some ill-starved mating of a snapping turtle and a mentally deficient hyena.

Surrounded by addicts of dog-food hamburgers, pasteboard beef, instant mashed potatoes, wallpaper-paste gravies, and artificial fruit drinks, the Saint managed to stab a few times at some greasily fried halibut before conceding defeat and trying to sustain himself on thoughts of the Epicurean supper he might order somewhere later on.

Cassie, now that she was wide awake and not in the immediate presence of any dead bodies, was showing mannerism of jiggling up and down in her chair with nervous exuberance like a vibrating machine, even while she was eating.

"Great, isn't it?" she chirped.

She was scraping up the last of some presumably canned beans. Simon made a despairing but bravely ambiguous sound, and Cassie glanced at his almost untouched plate.

"You don't eat much, do you?" she said.

"Like a bird."

"May I?"

Her fork was already across the table, so he slid the halibut to her and pulled some folded papers and a bank book from his pocket. For the first time he was starting to wonder if this evening and night would yield any enjoyable dividends at all.

"No cheques," sneered the waitress as she galloped by.

Simon mentally reduced her tip to a penny and started thumbing through the bank book. Cassie, bouncing up and down as

energetically as ever, peered at him over a forkful of fish.

"Counting your money?" she asked.

"Counting Perry Loudon's."

Her eyes grew wider. The fish remained suspended.

"You stole that?"

"I confiscated it, as material vital to my investigation of this case. Does that satisfy your moral scruples?"

Cassie shrugged and popped the fish into her mouth.

"Oh, I don't have any moral scruples."

Simon glanced up at her with a quizzical glint in his eyes.

"We'll test that out later." He went on talking to her as he studied the bank book. "My personal theory is that you're a phony."

"A phony?" squealed Cassie.

"Yes. An escapist who'd run off and hide from any tough situation at the first chance she got."

Simon stole a quick look to see whether his use of reverse psychology was having the intended effect. Cassie had stopped bouncing, and her mouth was compressed with outrage.

"Also," the Saint said, "I imagine your sophomoric braggadocio about moral scruples is just that: you'd probably crumple up and start crying if I so much as nibbled your ear."

"I. . .I'm still with you, aren't I?" she demanded.

He gave her a charming smile.

"I haven't nibbled your ear, yet."

"Well, I could have run away a long time ago."

"That's true, and I'm proud of you. Keep it up, because the worst is yet to come."

She pushed her plate away and watched him with worried, clouded-turquoise eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"I've found something interesting here." He tapped the bank book. "And I don't just mean the exorbitant prices people paid Loudon for those metal doodles of his."

"Well, *tell* me," said Cassie, starting to jiggle again.

"I will. In the meantime we'll be on our way to pay a visit."

"Where?"

"To a patron of the arts."

6

Simon hailed a cab and directed it to Upper Berkeley Mews. He

was not expecting that Longbottom or one of his confines would be waiting to pick up his trail there, because that was exactly where they would not expect him to have the cool insolence to go. He anticipated a good deal of travelling that night, and he would prefer the facilities of his own car. Cassie wanted to see the inside of his house, but he had rarely felt the pressure of time more urgently. He only let her into the downstairs garage, and in a matter of seconds they were on their way again, in the white Volvo which was his latest acquisition.

As he turned out of the Mews, he gave her the bank book he had taken from Perry Loudon's apartment and suggested that she look at it with a flashlight he always kept in the glove compartment.

Her first reaction, after a few seconds of scrutiny, was a low whistle.

"I had no idea he was so rich," she said. "I knew he was supposed to be a genius, but so are half the people on the same block. Here's seven hundred pounds. Five hundred pounds." Her voice became more excited. "Two *thousand* pounds."

"If you'll notice," said the Saint, "he's written the names of people against the checks he deposited, presumably for various chunks of that scrap metal of his. Those are the payments that are in the hundreds. But look at those large payments."

"There aren't any names by them," Cassie said. "They're all shown as cash."

"Yes. But do you notice that those big entries always seem to follow right after a certain purchaser's name?"

Cassie studied the book.

"Yes," she said. "Is it Finlay Thorpe-Jones?"

"He's the one."

"Here's five thousand pounds. Another two thousand. Three thousand. What is it? Do you figure this Finlay Thorpe-Jones was paying him extra for some reason?"

"Possibly."

"But why? And even if he did, nothing's wrong with that, is there?"

"No," Simon agreed. "But it's odd, wouldn't you agree? To pay somebody by check for art works, and then slip the really big money to him in cash. Of course if Loudon hadn't been murdered it wouldn't be any of my business how he got paid for what. But since I'm already suspected of having done something violent to him, I have an avid interest in all his affairs—partic-

ularly in the ones involving money, the ones that might motivate somebody to knock him off."

They had made the one-way circuit of Berkeley Square, and were heading westward on Charles Street.

"I have an idea," Cassie said.

She turned excitedly to Simon, who had to admit to himself inwardly that he had little confidence in her inspirations.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Maybe Perry Loudon was a blackmailer. Maybe he had something on this Thorpe-Jones character and this was his way of collecting payments. You know—give the man a chunk of steel he doesn't really want and charge him five thousand pounds for it?"

The Saint's opinion of his companion went up a little.

"Quite a nice theory," he admitted. "I'd wonder, though, why he didn't make it look more respectable by having the whole amount paid by check. Unless—it might have been a dodge to make most of the money look tax-exempt."

Cassie put away the bank book and the flashlight.

"How?"

"Like gambling winnings, for instance... But among the many things I've learned in a long and virtuous life is not to try to build bridges until you have enough spans. Why waste our time theorizing until we have more to go on? Especially when in just a few minutes I'll be able to talk to Mr. Finlay Thorpe-Jones in person."

Cassie looked startled in the light of a street lamp they were passing.

"You know who he is? Are we going to his house? I didn't know you'd looked up his address."

"I don't need to," said Simon. "He has what you might call a business address. He owns a gambling club. One of the plushest in London."

"You've been there?"

Simon smiled at the surprise in Cassie's question.

"I have. I've been almost everywhere. That's because I chose not to spend my life holed up in a garret as a plaster Saint."

She chose to ignore the dig. With one leg tucked under her, she was starting to vibrate up and down with nervous enthusiasm.

"Is this Thorpe-Jones a crook?"

"Not that I know of," Simon said. "No more than most people who've managed to grab a good share of what the world has

to offer. A man with the house percentage of roulette wheels and blackjack tables in his favor doesn't need to be a crook."

The Saint stopped his car opposite one of several formerly private mansions just off the upper end of Park Lane.

"This is it," he said. "I won't be long."

Cassie looked alarmed.

"Can't I come?"

"I'm afraid you're not dressed in quite the approved fashion."

"You're ashamed of me!"

She was pouting, glaring at the floor.

"No, I'm not. But they have certain rules in these places. You don't have to sit in the car, but don't go far away, please. I have enough to do without hunting you."

He was standing by the car now, looking in at her. She softened slightly.

"You'd hunt for me?" she asked.

"Of course."

She looked sullenly suspicious again.

"Why? Because I might go tell on you?"

Simon shook his head amiably.

"Not a bit. You couldn't tell on me, because you're an accomplice after the fact. Of course for turning in your partner—me—they might cut your sentence down a few years, especially considering your youth and good looks."

She emitted a helpless, mare-like sound and furiously folded her arms.

"You wouldn't hunt for me because you *liked* me," she called after him. "You *hate* me. You're *ashamed* of me!"

Simon resisted the impulse to put his hands over his ears as he walked away. He was beginning to wonder whether an isolated garret might not be an ideal spot for Cassie Lane after all.

The open doorway of Thorpe-Jones' establishment was embellished in stone bas-relief and lighted by an ornate iron lamp on either side. A doorman recognized Simon immediately and ushered him into the thickly carpeted entrance hall. A number of ultramodern metal and stone sculptures lined the area.

"I'd like to see Mr. Thorpe-Jones, please," the Saint said.

"One moment, Mr. Templar. I'll see if it's possible."

While he waited in the foyer, Simon glanced into the gambling rooms, where the dominant sounds were the click of chips and the occasional whir and clatter of the ball in a turning wheel.

The players were pressed close around the tables, and suspense made them almost completely silent. Until Simon looked, he might have thought the building almost deserted.

The doorman came hurrying back past the sculptures, whose variety and number seemed to attest to the genuineness of Thorpe-Jones interest in that sort of art, and asked the Saint to follow him.

Thorpe-Jones' private office was a superb room panelled in walnut decorated with more modern sculpture, and beautifully furnished in a somehow vaguely feminine way. Thorpe-Jones himself, who rose to greet the Saint cordially, was an erect, thin man of middle years, with long strands of brown hair from the still-flourishing area at the back of his head combed wetly forward in an effort to cover the bald spaces at the front. He wore a tuxedo, with lace showing at the cuffs of his shirt, and he was redolent of cologne. His smile was both aristocratic and ingratiating.

"Mr. Templar," he said, extending an elegant hand. "I hope you have no complaints, but it's men with your standards who keep us up to the mark."

Simon coolly returned the smile.

"No complaints at all. In fact, I only just came in. I came about something else."

Thorpe-Jones nodded and waited, and Simon decided to let him wait. His keen blue eyes wandered over the sculptures, and he recognized in several the style of Perry Loudon.

"Impressive collection," he said. "Which one is Perry Loudon's latest masterpiece?"

"Behind you," answered Thorpe-Jones.

The Saint turned to look at a very large and massive heap of metal set in which made it seem to dominate the whole room. Interwoven with the metal was delicately twisted neon tubing which glowed with strange effect down in the cavernous recesses and passages of the sculptures.

"Unusual," said the Saint.

"No one else has ever used the technique of combining neon and metal so effectively, as far as I know. Loudon's an original mind. I think he has a great future."

"I'm afraid he hasn't."

Thorpe-Jones bridled with aristocratic restraint and looked at Simon with slightly offended pale grey eyes.

"Are you an art critic among your many other accomplishments?" he asked the Saint.

"Possibly; but that wasn't my meaning. I intended that as a piece of information, assuming you didn't know it already. Perry Loudon is dead. He was murdered this afternoon."

Thorpe-Jones' astonishment seemed real. Simon was expert at assessing such reactions, and neither did Thorpe-Jones go too far in the direction of tears and lamentations.

"Are you serious?" he asked in a shocked voice.

Simon nodded.

"Anyway, the police think so. But the motive is obscure."

Thorpe-Jones frowned and paced the floor.

"These bohemian types, you know," he said. "Jealousies and quarrels. Many of them take dope now. I suppose such things are bound to happen, but it's a great loss."

Simon went to the huge sculpture of neon and steel which towered over everything else in the office. He ran his fingers lightly over some of the surfaces.

"I suppose this will put up the price of your collection?"

Thorpe-Jones stopped abruptly and stared at him.

"Are you suggesting that I. . ."

The Saint raised a reassuring hand.

"No, I wasn't. But a dead sculptor is worth more than a live one to the people who own his works."

"A few hundred pounds more, maybe," said Thorpe-Jones. "Loudon is no big name. It would hardly have been worth my while to kill him for what I could make here in a night. Besides Mr. Templar, I don't kill people and I resent the implication that I do."

Simon gave a slight bow which might have been interpreted as politely apologetic.

"I'm sure you don't Mr Thorpe-Jones. You make enough killings with your wheels."

Thorpe-Jones smiled thinly.

"If my clients wish to commit a highly enjoyable and more or less socially acceptable form of suicide, the least I can do is to oblige them."

The Saint touched the large sculpture again.

"May I ask what this cost?"

Thorpe-Jones raised his eyebrows.

"Is that your standard of artistic value, Mr. Templar?" he

asked condescendingly. "Surely that can't be all you came to see me about?"

"Believe it or not, it is. My business has to do with the price of the pieces you bought from Perry Loudon. Would I be far off if I guessed that this latest one cost in the neighborhood of two thousand pounds?"

"You would be far off," the other replied stiffly. "Nothing I've bought from Loudon even came to a thousand."

"Did he play the tables here and win a lot?"

"Anyone will tell you, Mr. Templar, that this club has an inviolable rule never to discuss the accounts of its members."

"Would you have made large payments to Loudon for any other reason?"

"I'd ask you to leave, Mr. Templar, but I'm intrigued enough by your questions to want to know more. For what reason would I make payments of thousands of pounds to Perry Loudon?"

"Blackmail?" hazarded the Saint.

Thorpe-Jones gave a dignified snort.

"Blackmail?" he repeated starchily. "On what possible grounds?"

Simon shook his head innocently.

"I wouldn't know, of course."

His host, who no longer showed much semblance of the friendliness he had displayed when Simon had first come in, walked to the door.

"Your insinuations are quite out of line," he said coldly. "I can give you only one answer. If I were a killer—if I *had* killed Perry Loudon, and you had accused me of it as you have tonight, you would not walk out of this room."

He opened the door, and Simon passed into the foyer.

"You see?" said Thorpe-Jones. "You're quite free to go, and the worst you'll get from me, if you keep up this kind of talk in public, is a slander suit."

"If you're telling the truth," the Saint said, "you'll never have any reason to worry about trouble with me."

"I'm so glad to know."

"I thought you'd be pleased. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Templar."

When Simon had walked along the carpet and out of the building between the double lamps at the door, he saw Cassie Lane jumping up and down on the corner half a block away, waving violently to get his attention. She came running down the sidewalk to meet him.

She clutched his arm tugging him in the direction from which she had come. She was gasping so hard for breath that she could get out only one sentence.

"I heard you in there," she said.

7

"You *heard* me?" the Saint asked. "In the gambling club?"

"Yes," Cassie panted. "I heard you talking. Come on, hurry!"

She dragged him towards an alley, a short block from Thorpe-Jones' building. It seemed to be a dead end. There was a van parked in it, its front facing the street. There was no one in the driver's seat or anywhere near the truck.

"There!" Cassie announced, pointing at it.

Simon looked at the perfectly ordinary vehicle, whose sides advertised it as a carrier of imported Grecian table delicacies. He looked back at Cassie.

"I see the van, dear," he said with elaborate patience. "Shall we go now?"

"No," she whispered. "Listen. This is where I heard your voice."

She pulled him to the side of the van. He stood quietly for a moment. Ghostly voices seemed to come to his ears from no discernable source. One of them sounded like Thorpe-Jones, and the other was unknown.

"Does the sum of two thousand pounds mean anything to you, in connection with Perry Loudon?" the voice of Thorpe-Jones was asking.

After a pause, the second voice answered. Though the sounds were weak, the words were distinct.

"Not a thing, guv'nor. You never paid that much money for these statues, did you?"

Simon moved stealthily around to the back of the truck and put his eye to a crack between the closed doors, from which came a thin line of light. Not only could he hear Thorpe-Jones more clearly, but he could see him too. The van was a mobile television monitoring station, and at the front end of the enclosed part, facing Simon's vantage point, was a screen showing a large section of the office he had just left a few minutes before. With the owner of the gambling club was a hulk of a man with wavy blonde hair and gigantic shoulders which must have required special tailoring even for undershirts. Simon, on previous visits to the

club, had seen the man, who was called Bonnie and was Thorpe-Jones' personal bodyguard.

"Well," Thorpe-Jones was saying, "if there's something in this that implicates me, I want to know about it."

"Should I check it?" Bonnie asked.

"Not yet. The best way to invite suspicion would be to show too much interest. Let's hold off overnight at least and see what develops."

Bonnie left the room, and Thorpe-Jones went to his desk and began looking through some papers. Simon's view of the interior of the van was so limited that he could see only straight down the center. A figure moved between him and the screen. He could not tell if there was more than one man in the listening station or not.

"What is it?" whispered Cassie.

"First, let's get away from here," he cautioned her.

He did not answer her question until they had walked a safe distance from the van.

"Somebody has managed to get a television camera into Thorpe-Jones' office. From that van, they're watching every move he makes, and probably recording it, too."

"But why?"

"Blackmail, most probably. And maybe not just blackmail of Thorpe-Jones. He's a friend of a lot of high-up people, and all sorts of interesting things may go on in that mansion of his."

The Saint led the way to his car as he was speaking to Cassie. He helped her in, got in the driver's seat, and drove a few yards in the direction of the side street where the van was parked. When he stopped he was in a position to see just the nose of the van.

"How could they get a television camera into his office?" Cassie asked.

"I'm sure it took a lot of ingenuity," Simon said. "Can't you guess?"

Cassie shook her head.

"It's in one of Perry Loudon's sculptures," he told her. "I've just been in that room, and I know exactly where the camera would have to be placed in order to give that particular view. It's in a big steel and neon monstrosity—the last thing Thorpe-Jones bought from Loudon."

Cassie was stupefied. She was sitting bolt upright staring at him.

"Then Perry was in with crooks," she said. "Is that it?"

"More or less. I think Thorpe-Jones was on the level when he told me he'd never paid Loudon as much as a thousand pounds for one of those heaps. Which means that those big payments in Loudon's bank book must have come from the people who wanted microphones and television cameras incorporated into his creations."

Cassie flopped back in her seat.

"Nobody ever offered *me* two thousand pounds to incorporate *any*thing into *my* creations."

The Saint patted her knee sympathetically.

"Well, cheer up. There's a good side to it. You're not dead and Perry Loudon is."

She thought about that for a while, and before she could make a comment Simon suddenly turned the ignition key and started the engine. A man had just appeared from around the van and was walking briskly, carrying a fat briefcase, towards a gray Mini parked a hundred feet or so in front of the Saint's. The van stayed where it was as the Mini pulled away from the curb and headed towards North Audley Street.

"If you follow him," said Cassie, "we're liable to end up like Perry Loudon—dead!"

"If I don't follow him," the Saint retorted, "I'm very likely to end up in jail, which is a prospect I don't fancy at all. I've got to catch Perry Loudon's real killers within the next two or three hours, and you're going to have the privilege of a front-row seat for the show."

Cassie moaned, let her head fall back, and closed her eyes.

"I wish I were at home with my dummies," she whispered, as if in prayer.

The Mini went north at a moderate speed and crossed over Oxford Street, with Simon following only a few lengths behind it. Traffic was now sparse, and there were few turns. It was one of the easier jobs of tail-light dogging the Saint had ever attempted, and it was over before the driver of the automobile he was following had any reason to become suspicious.

The end of the line was an elegant apartment building eight stories high, overlooking Regent's Park in an even more obviously mink-poodle-Rolls Royce neighborhood than Finlay Thorpe-Jones' gambling club had been, where even the sidewalks seemed to exude an air of staid and irreproachable status.

"Follow him in," Simon said. "He might recognize me."

Before Cassie could protest, he had stopped his car, leaned

across her to open the door on her side, and firmly propelled her out on to the street.

"Hurry," he said.

She obeyed, and probably was taken by the red-uniformed guardian of the apartment building's thick glass doors as the errant daughter of some millionaire. The doorman undoubtedly knew, as do the proprietors of the most exclusive shops, that the sloppiest looking client may very well be the richest. Cassie was inside within fifteen seconds after the man from the cream-colored car had gone through the same doors. In less than half a minute the same man emerged again, and Cassie strolled out with apparent indifference as he drove away. Then she ran across the street to Simon's window.

"I saw him give some boxes to the desk clerk," she gasped, all out of breath.

"What kind of boxes?"

"Like cigarette boxes, only bigger."

"Probably video or voice tapes from the van," Simon said. "Did either of them say anything while he was making the delivery?"

"The man from the car just said 'Usual routine' and then turned around and walked away. The desk clerk used the telephone—I think to call one of the apartments, because he didn't dial a regular number. He said something like, 'The usual packages have arrived, sir.' That was it."

"Wait here," said the Saint.

He left her standing by the car as he hurried across the street, had the glass doors opened for him by their red-clad attendant, and went straight to the desk. He hoped that if the boxes were to be picked up by someone living in the building he would be in time to watch the transaction. His eyes flickered towards the two elevators as the clerk came to speak to him. By watching the floor indicators above the elevator doors, he could possibly gain some idea where the boxes would be taken. The elevator for general use, its indicator dial bearing the numbers one through seven, was idle. The second, labeled PENTHOUSE ONLY, was descending.

"Good evening, sir," said the clerk. "May I help you?"

"I'm not sure I have the right building. I'm looking for a Mr. Steinberger."

"No, sir. Not here. I'm sorry."

"It might be Bergstein."

"I'm afraid not."

The clerk, who was a waxen-looking little figure anyway, like something off a wedding cake, was becoming perceptibly more rigid all the time.

"Just plain Stein?" the Saint offered plaintively.

"No," said the clerk.

The doors of the penthouse elevator slid open and Simon instantly turned his head and moved towards the street exit. The man he glimpsed was the lighter haired of the two who had killed Perry Loudon. But the man had not recognized him and was intent only on taking the boxes from the clerk. As Simon went out through the glass doors, he was debating the relative advantages of subterfuge and immediate open attack. The pleasure of flattening one murderer's nose was not worth the possible loss of a whole nest of related rodents, and the Saint did not think for a moment that the man who had come from the elevator played more than a subordinate role in the plot which had already taken at least two lives. Some preparations would be necessary before the denouement.

Besides, Simon had seen something in a lighted niche of the private elevator which told him more even than he really needed to know about the occupant of the penthouse. In the niche was a statue of a porpoise, black, carved in obsidian.

8

As he drove back towards Chelsea, Simon explained the significance of the black porpoise to the girl at his side.

"The last time I saw it," he said, "was on a yacht off the coast of Grand Bahama Island. It was a kind of emblem or trademark of the man who owned the boat, and it was painted on the hull. He also had it on a flag which was flying over a resort he was building at that end of the island."

"Was he a friend of yours?"

Simon smiled grimly.

"No. I was fouling up some large-scale blackmail plans of his, and he did his best to have me hunted down and killed. Naturally I not only fouled up his plans, but I also refused to be killed, and ended up sailing away in his yacht."

"Who is he?" Cassie asked.

"Kuros Timonaides is his name. A Greek. He's one of the most vicious crooks on earth—more so because he uses every trick in the book to stay out of trouble with the law. He's downright re-

spectable as far as most people know. Always getting his grinning mug in the papers with some celebrity or other he's entertaining. But underneath it all he's one of the most rotten pillars any society ever had to put up with. I thought of him the instant I realized what that van was doing near the gambling club. Who else but the man who made blackmail and extortion an industry with profits running in the millions would have gone to those lengths?"

Cassie suddenly gave a sigh of relief.

"Well," she said, "now that we know, we can call the police, and they can arrest him, and we can. . ."

"We can do nothing of the kind," the Saint said. "We've no concrete evidence. Claud Eustace Teal wouldn't arrest a kid for stealing hub-caps just on my say-so. I'm going to arrange a very special kind of party at Timonaides' penthouse, and dear old Claud is going to be the guest of honor."

They were still a number of blocks from Cassie's flat when a police car darted out from a corner behind them, light flashing.

"Or maybe old Claud is arranging a party for me," said the Saint, unperturbed.

He pulled over to the curb and stopped. A uniformed police officer climbed out of the official car, walked up to Simon's window, and regarded him with a certain amount of reverence.

"Chief Inspector Teal issued an all-cars order to watch for you, Mr. Templar," he said.

"That's nice," murmured the Saint. "He's so awfully fond of me that he just can't bear to have me out of his sight for more than an hour. Or am I under arrest?"

"Oh, not at all," the officer said hurriedly. "But it's urgent that you meet Inspector Teal at. . . "

"The Coningsby Warehouse in Battersea?" Simon concluded for him.

The policeman gawked.

"That's it," he said, consulting a note pad in order to be sure. "How did you know?"

"I understand the workings of pathetically logical little minds. Shall we be on our way? I presume you'll be our escort."

"We'll follow," said the officer, tactfully.

Teal was waiting excitedly in front of the concrete walls of the warehouse like some weird parody of the Biblical father anticipating the arrival of the prodigal son. He was chewing gum double-time and occasionally rubbing his hands together. His plump face

gleamed with perspiration as Simon walked up to him with Cassie close behind.

"Nice place you have here, Claud," Simon said. "I always wondered where you hung up your hat after a hard day's work. Which crate do you sleep in?"

"This way," said Teal, refusing to let his elation be spoiled.

Near the center of the great high-ceilinged room stood the sculpture which Simon had arranged for his old acquaintance Bert to remove from Perry Loudon's studio. Beside it stood a man in shirtsleeves, with goggles on his forehead, holding an unlighted cutting torch. Bert the mover was chatting with him; when Bert saw Simon he hurried over.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Templar," he said. "It was nothing we done wrong. They called me in after we finished up and went home. And I don't even know why."

"It's okay," said Simon. "No problem."

Teal turned on him exuberantly.

"No problem?" he crowed. "No problem? We'll see about that. Go ahead, boys."

His last words were addressed to the men around the metal sculpture. Valves were turned, a match struck, and the cutting torch spat into life. The Saint looked at Teal sadly.

"Poor old Claud Eustace," he said. "What paranoiac fantasy of yours is this all about?"

"I had another phone call," Teal said.

"You *are* getting popular," congratulated the Saint. "Think of that! Anonymous again?"

Teal nodded.

"The information about your having the statue moved was very interesting," he said, but this time I knew it was accurate, because the man I had staked out at Loudon's place had already reported the same thing. We've got you this time, Templar, and there's no way out!"

The torch had been turned on the sculpture and was following the seams left by Simon's use of a torch earlier in the evening. Teal perspired with anticipation, and Cassie took Simon's hand and squeezed it as the point of flame ate into the metal. When at last the cutting was finished the workman looked to Teal for approval and then inserted a crowbar into one of the cuts. With a heave he pried out the whole loosened segment of metal and sent it clattering loudly to the concrete floor.

All those who had been watching and waiting leaned forward eagerly.

There was nothing inside.

Teal went unbelievingly over and put his head in the hollow space and looked up and looked down. He turned around and his chin began to tremble.

"I don't know what *that* was supposed to prove," said the Saint, "but if you can't stick it back together again that's six months of your precious salary gone up the spout."

He took Cassie's arm.

"Shall we go?" he said to her. "I think our party should be a lot more interesting than this."

He turned back at the door and looked at Teal, whose eyes had taken a strange glaze and whose jaw was working soundlessly even though he was chewing no gum.

"If we seem unappreciative about the show, Claud, don't feel bad. You can't expect us laymen to comprehend all the deeper mysteries of police work."

As soon as he and Cassie were in his car, the Saint became all seriousness.

"That penthouse is going to be no easy fortress to attack," he said.

"What do we do?" Cassie asked. "Hire an army?"

"I had in mind something like that."

They were on the road again, continuing their interrupted journey towards Cassie's flat.

"As soon as we get to your place," Simon said, "call all the weirdo people you can think of—you must know plenty—and invite them to a big party at Timonaides' penthouse. Say he's your rich uncle or something, and he's giving away free booze by the gallon. Say you're celebrating a sale he's arranged for some of your dummies. You can also say that the doorman and clerk are terribly stuffy and suspicious of people they don't know, so you should all meet on the sidewalk here and then go to the apartment house en masse so you'll be given a pleasant reception. Right?"

"I guess so. But why?"

"To give me a cover, and for other reasons I'll explain later. Can you do that? Can you find enough people?"

Cassie grinned.

"All I'd have to do on Pinter Street is whisper 'free booze' behind my hand and there'd be a riot."

Pinter Street, whatever its riot potential showed few signs even

of life when the Saint parked his car in front of the house where Cassie lived. It was nearly midnight, and only a sprinkling of lighted windows up and down the block indicated that some of the creative inhabitants of the area were still awake smoking pot or—hopefully—doing their artistic bit for western culture.

Cassie hesitated at the front door of the house with her key in the lock.

"I don't want to go up," she said soberly.

"Why?"

"You know why."

"I'll be right beside you," he said. "Anybody who can live up there with those dummies can take anything."

He took an encouraging grip on her arm, and she opened the door. A tiny bulb showed the way upstairs. Unlike Perry Loudon's home next door, which had been a single unit, this house had been divided into small flats. Cassie stopped beside the door at the foot of the stairs and banged on it loudly. A moment later a shaggy dark head, with long beard, like an illustration from Robinson Crusoe, protruded blearily into the hall.

"Say, Sam," said Cassie, with forced enthusiasm, "my rich uncle's giving a party, with all the free booze you can drink. Everybody's invited."

It was impossible to determine visually what Sam's reaction was, since there was no skin discernable under the hair, but his eyes seemed to glitter more wildly in the undergrowth, and with a sound undoubtedly connoting pleasure and gratitude he turned and vanished into his rooms.

"Do you think he's coming or not?" Simon asked.

He and Cassie hurried up the stairs.

"Oh, yes," she said. "He's just going to get some clothes on, I imagine. He generally never wears any."

"With all that fur, he probably doesn't need any, but I'm glad he's going formal tonight."

Cassie knocked on another door down the hall from her own and delivered her message, and then she and Simon went into her flat. They had scarcely entered and turned on the light when the neighbor just aroused by Cassie came running down the hall and through the door behind them. She was an attractive girl with long brown hair, and she wore a brilliantly flowered shift. Cassie introduced her to Simon as Annie.

"Is it all right if I call Ned?" she asked breathlessly.

"If he doesn't bring his wolfhound," Cassie answered.

"Oh, let him bring his wolfhound," Simon interceded. "Wolfhounds don't drink much, and your uncle can afford it."

"He'll have to have vodka," giggled the girl. "He's a Russian wolfhound."

Suddenly she stared at the wall on the other side of the room, and Simon could sense the terrible tension which gripped Cassie's body.

"Oh, you've made a new one!" the girl exclaimed. "Isn't that groovy? It. . .it's much more real looking than the others ever were."

She was on her way to examine the object more closely when Cassie cut out the light with the switch beside the door.

"No time for that now," she said. "My uncle might change his mind if we keep him waiting."

Annie went back out into the dimly lit hall with a shrug and returned to her own flat. Cassie spoke with a voice calculated to carry.

"Oh, I forgot something!"

She and Simon went back into her flat, locked the door, and turned on the light. Cassie sagged against the wall and closed her eyes. Simon put a comforting arm around her shoulders.

"Quick thinking," he said.

"I don't believe I can stand much more," she moaned.

"You won't have to. Soon you'll be in the clear. But the last step is the hardest."

He went over to the body of Perry Loudon, which sat propped against the wall like a brother of the dummy, Caspar. Loudon's face was coated white with a smearing of plaster, and his features were painted in. Dark glasses covered his eyes, and there was a straw hat on his head.

Simon indicated an open box near by.

"These are big sacks for wrapping your dummies, aren't they?" he asked.

Cassie nodded weakly.

"Fine." The Saint went to the box and pulled out a bag, holding it up to check the size.

"Do I. . .have to watch?" asked Cassie.

"No. You're looking a little green. Some fresh air would do you good. While I'm taking care of this you can run across the roof to Loudon's studio and bring me back a hook and a rope. You can't miss them—they're part of some kind of pulley he had rigged for lifting those sculptures of his."

Cassie nodded and gratefully headed for the door to the roof.

"Shouldn't you call some more people, too?" Simon inquired. "We need more than four or five."

"Don't worry," said Cassie. "The word is already travelling. We'll have more than enough. Believe me."

As she disappeared into the darkness outside, the Saint wet a cloth at the washbasin and prepared to remove all trace of Cassie's art from Perry Loudon's corpse.

Ten minutes later Simon, with Cassie helping to ease a little of the burden, came out on the sidewalk carrying a bulky bag on his back.

It was then that Simon discovered that Cassie's assurance about having an adequate number of guests for her fictitious uncle's party had been very well founded. The formerly quiet street in front of her house had been transformed into open air bedlam. At least two dozen males and females were laughing, shouting, arguing, playing guitars, dancing, or engaging in the early stages of lovemaking. Their costumes proclaimed their eccentricity, or poverty, or both. Sandals were the predominant footwear, and jeans were the most generally popular article of clothing, but the Saint was not unhappy to see that miniskirts had several adherents among the girls.

Naturally his appearance with Cassie set off a storm of shouted questions. The mob surged up around them.

"What's in the bag?"

"Who's your boy friend, Cassie?"

"How're we going to get to this uncle's pad?"

The last question, put by Robinson Crusoe, seemed the most relevant and practical.

"Somebody go in the house and call some taxis," Simon suggested. "Cassie's uncle is paying for everything."

That precipitated a minor rush for Robinson Crusoe's flat. A couple of the boys who had not been quite able to weed out every trace of a genteel bourgeois upbringing were polite enough to help Simon get his burden into the trunk of his car.

"Feels like a body," joked one of them.

"One of Cassie's dummies," said the Saint. "A present for her uncle."

A minute or so later the first cab arrived and was immediately engulfed in a sea of screaming bohemians.

"Hold it here," Simon shouted to the driver over the babble

and the guitar music. "Wait till we're all ready, and I'll lead the way."

Soon another cab arrived, and then another. A bottle smashed in the gutter. All the party-goers were not waiting for the free liquor promised by Cassie's uncle. A few had arrived staggering drunk in the first place. The uproar was becoming deafening, and several uninvited individuals, attracted by the noise, stumbled from their houses and piled into the fifth and final taxi.

Simon saw that all the drivers had the proper address, and then he started his car. Cassie was in the front seat with him. In back was a blank-faced girl and a pair of boys who were discussing Swedenborgianism. Then up the street, shouting for them to wait, came the possessor of the wolfhound who had been mentioned earlier. The owner in vaguely Edwardian costume, was at least seven feet tall, and the leashed wolfhound, had he been on his hind legs, would not have been much less. Both of them scrambled into the back of the Saint's car, completely crushing out any lingering thoughts of Swedenborg. The entire ride became a grim battle for survival of the fittest—and there seemed no doubt that the wolfhound would ultimately prove the fittest.

Luckily, though, the drive was not long enough to bring the principles of natural selection into really fatal play, and when they pulled up in front of their destination—the apartment house in which Timonaides' had his penthouse—the only dead body in the automobile was still that of Perry Loudon. The blank-faced girl seemed anesthetized against all experience, both pleasant and painful. The two Swedenborgians were only slightly damaged, and Simon had escaped with nothing worse than having his ear repeatedly rasped by the wolfhound's tongue.

"We're here," Simon could say at last. "Everybody out."

The taxis had kept close behind, and soon the sidewalk in front of the apartment building resembled an assembly point for war refugees. Some of them, curious to inspect the sumptuous lobby, started to move in without waiting for further leadership, and the influx began.

The doorman would certainly have stopped the flood if he could have, but he was almost smothered by two mini-skirted dolls who showed their admiration for his gold-braided scarlet uniform by trying to tear it off him.

Simon held Cassie back for a moment to remind her of her instructions.

"The penthouse elevator won't come down unless somebody up

there lets it go. When I release it you'll be able to tell by the red indicator. Until then, keep stalling—say you don't want to start up until you're sure the whole gang is there, and double-talk any of the staff who want to know who you've come to see. I'm counting on you like the cavalry in those old movies."

Simon opened the trunk of his car and took out Loudon's burlap wrapped body, now wound and tied with the rope that Cassie had brought him from the studio, and carried it through the mob that was straggling into the building. Some of them were singing, with unwitting aptness. *"When the Saints Go Marching In."*

The desk clerk's first reaction was to fall back in panic like a weaponless hunter in front of a herd of charging elephants. Then, gathering courage, he ran around his desk and tried to plead with the throng, who could not hear a word he was saying. The uproar was augmented by the taxi drivers following some of the crowd in to demand their fares.

Using all his fantastic strength, the Saint contrived to swing his burden airily in one hand, so that no one could have imagined it to have the weight of anything like a body—it might as well have been some kind of standard lamp that he was bringing in. And with his immaculately groomed good looks and unobtrusively expensive elegance of dress, and his air of easily aristocratic assurance, no one could possibly have associated him with the dishevelled and hirsute rabble through which he passed—an impression which he took pains to underline by avoiding their proximity with the same kind of pained and shocked regard that any rightful occupant of such a building would have bestowed on them.

He headed straight for the general elevator, and started it up before anyone else could shove in after him. The clamor was quickly cut off as the elevator ascended, leaving only the hiss of its passage up the shaft.

Once more the Saint was on his own.

9

He stopped at the sixth floor and threw the switch which would lock the elevator doors in open position. In that way he not only advertised his presence on a floor where he would not remain, but he also delayed pursuit—probably until somebody could climb six flights of stairs and close the doors again.

The corridor was as beautifully carpeted and elegantly simple

as the foyer on the ground floor. The Saint's footsteps produced no sound as he passed swiftly along the hallway to the marked entrance to the fire-escape stairwell. He climbed the stone steps to the seventh floor, and there further ascent was blocked by a steel-faced door which was locked. No doubt it could be easily opened from the penthouse side, giving access to the escape from upstairs, but was intended to prevent unwelcome entrance from below. For Simon's purposes, the set-up could not have been more ideal if he had designed it himself.

It took him literally only a few seconds to release the lock by a technique which it would not be in the public interest to describe in detail. He deposited Loudon's body on the other side and removed the rope, leaving the sackcloth wrapping.

At the top of the last flight of stairs there was another door, this one with a wire-reinforced and frosted glass panel in it through which light came, but the possibility was too high that such a door would be protected by some kind of burglar alarm, and Simon regretfully decided not to chance it. After everything had panned out so miraculously well up to that point, it would be absurd to risk blowing the situation that had been so beautifully created.

He went out through the steel-faced door again, pulling the spring lock shut behind him, and leaving no trace of his visit except the sack-swathed corpse which any investigation would naturally conclude could only have been brought there from the penthouse itself.

He had previously noticed that there was a window for daytime illumination at each end of the carpeted landing corridor, and he walked quickly to the nearest one and opened it on to the cool night air. The lights of London were spread below him as he leaned out, but his interest was directed upwards.

As he had observed before driving away from the building earlier that night, the penthouse was set back several feet from the main profile of the building, so that it was surrounded by terraces with a railing of some kind around their edge.

The Saint uncoiled the rope he was carrying, folded his handkerchief diagonally and wrapped it around the steel hook, securing it with a knot at each end. He let the hook dangle out of the window and lowered it down the side of the building until enough length was available for the next step, which would be the most difficult of all: to swing the hook up through the air so that it would catch on the railing eight feet above. He started

it swinging like a pendulum, and then using a strong jerk of his wrist he hurled it upward with a whiplash motion. The hook flew out of sight and clunked softly against metal overhead, the noise of its impact muffled by the handkerchief binding. It did not bounce away and fall down again towards the puddles of light on the street far below, and when he tested the rope, drawing in all the slack, it seemed securely held. As long as the railing itself did not give away, he had it made. If it didn't, of course, it would provide a crucial test of his ability to bounce off a pavement from a height of about 100 feet...

There was no time or reason for more testing or delay. Grasping the rope tightly, he climbed to a sitting position on the window sill and then let his body swing out into space. With the trained, perfectly conditioned muscles of an acrobat he drew himself up, hand over hand, until he had reached the edge of the balcony. Then he transferred his grip to the wrought iron fence on which his hook had caught, and with two powerful heaves of his arms and a lithe upswing of his hips and legs he sailed over the rail and landed like a cat on to the gratifying firm paving of the roof garden.

He was on a terrace about ten feet wide at that point, just outside a pair of closed sliding glass doors which led into one room of the penthouse. Because of the lack of light inside, he could see only enough through the doors to judge that it seemed to be some kind of den or library. Around the nearest corner, the terrace was much wider, with planter boxes and porch chairs arranged about it and there were lights in some of the windows farther along that side—apparently the Timonaides menage was not yet all in bed. But on the side where the Saint had arrived, all was quiet and dark. Simon detached the hook from the railings, retrieved and coiled the rope, and went back to the dark sliding doors. They slid easily at his touch. Whatever precautions might have been taken to prevent unexpected guests from arriving by conventional routes, it apparently had never occurred to those inside that anything more worrisome than a bird could arrive by way of the terrace.

The Saint detached the hook from the railing, retrieved his handkerchief, and coiled the rope. Then he moved stealthily into the study, or whatever it was.

It proved to be precisely that. The beam of his pocket flashlight showed him banks of built-in bookshelves, filing cabinets, a sound-and-television console, overstuffed masculine leather arm-

chairs, and an open brick fireplace, also a massive semicircular desk with three telephones of different colors and banks of push-buttons, from which a man ensconced in the central swivel chair behind it might feel that he had the controls of an empire at his finger-tips—as indeed, in a way, Kuros Timonaides probably did have.

The desk was locked but had no keyholes in the drawers. The Saint recognized the style, and within a few seconds he had determined that a pair of immovable silver inkwells built into the top of the desk were the means by which it was opened. A little experimentation was necessary, but shortly he had tried turning both inkwells in a clockwise direction simultaneously, and all the drawers in the desk suddenly slid open two inches.

Inside one of the largest and deepest drawers were neatly stacked rows of boxes such as Cassie had described seeing the courier from the van leave with the clerk below. Several of them, as Simon could see with the beam of his flashlight, were labelled THORPE-JONES. Others bore various labels, many of them names which appeared frequently in headlines or on the society pages of newspapers, and all were carefully indexed in some complicated numerical and alphabetical system. These boxes of film and tape were obviously some of the material of Kuros Timonaides' latest blackmail organization.

He did not need to investigate any further before he studied the telephone and pushbutton system and selected the combination most likely to give him an outside line. He dialled the special number of Teal's department at Scotland Yard.

"This is a message for Chief Inspector Teal," he said in the lowest possible voice that the instrument would transmit. "You must get it to him at once, wherever he is, even if he's asleep. It's about the Saint. Tell him that it isn't another of those anonymous messages he's been getting lately. This is Simon Templar himself speaking. Tell him that I've discovered that Perry Loudon really was murdered, and I know all about it. He must come here at once and see the evidence. This is the address. . ."

He gave the location twice, making certain that it was correctly taken down, and then hung up, refusing to answer any questions.

There were two doors in the study. Simon went to the first one his eye chose, opened it silently, and looked out into what seemed to be the central hallway of the penthouse. It was bright with ingenious panel lighting, and although there were no windows

there were many doors, including one with a different trim and pattern which singled it out as obviously belonging to the private elevator, beside which a small square waist-high panel glowed discretely pink. Simon crossed to it and touched the button beside it, and the panel turned delicately green. He was satisfied that he had released the exclusive elevator, and that it would now be available to Cassie's crowd below whenever they got around to using it.

He went back to the study and surveyed it again. On top of the audio-video console, there were a couple of tape boxes, unlabelled, which could reasonably be assumed to be that night's delivery from the Thorpe-Jones monitoring operation. At any rate, there could be little harm in subtracting them from Teal's possible confusions, which he proceeded to do by opening them in the fireplace and igniting some loosened ends of tape with his pocket lighter. Hopefully, that might expunge the record of his earlier visit to the Mayfair gambler's establishment. He added a few more spools from the desk drawer for luck, to preclude suspicion that he might have been searching for any particular reel, and also to help the blaze. He added his helpful rope with the hook still attached to it to the bonfire: the hook at least would survive, and if any policeman were so thorough as to sift through the ashes it would be an additional relict for Timonaides to have to explain.

Then he turned his attention to the filing cabinets, which also proved to be locked. But his time was running out, as he had known all along that it would; and the noise he was making and which he had become increasingly careless of, combined with the spit and crackle of highly combustible materials in the fireplace, finally brought an interruption to his activities.

The second door was abruptly flung open, and the flickering reflections of flame on walls and ceiling, which had already enabled him to dispense with the aid of his flashlight, were suddenly wiped out in a blaze of overhead light as a main switch was snapped on.

The lighter haired of the two men whom he had met in Loudon's studio stood in the entrance, a pistol with a silencer in his hand at hip level, and just behind him was Timonaides, in a rich wine-colored brocade dressing-gown with unbuttoned white shirt and regular trousers showing above and below, obviously disturbed only partly on his way to bed. The room behind them, from the lighted slice of it which could be seen past them, seemed

to be the formal living-room of the suite.

"Come on in," said the Saint genially. "Make yourselves at home. After all, it is your home, isn't it?"

"What are you doing here?" Timonaides croaked.

He was not a tall man, but he was massive, and despite his in-between costume he was able to retain an aura of vastly founded power and menace. Simon, who had seen him before in the full suavity of total command, had to admit that he stood up to potential catastrophe with an evil distinction which, after all, could only have been essential to cresting the ambiguous heights which his career had achieved.

"I thought we might celebrate Thermopylae together, Kuros, old chum," said the Saint. "We should have some good reminiscences to swap, of battles long ago. How did you get out of that last bind in the Bahamas?"

"Fortunately, I have influential friends there."

"Whom you know how to influence in your own way?"

Timonaides' dark eyes were flat and humorless.

"Everyone has a skeleton in his closet, the Bahamians are no exception. I make it a rule to find the skeleton in an important closet in any place where I am active, so that I can be sure that I have power to use it I should need it."

"You do have some ingenious skeleton-hunting methods," Simon conceded. "Like bribing Perry Loudon to bug the bits of sculpture he sold to Finlay Thorpe-Jones, even to the extent of building in a television eye."

"You detected that, did you? Your reputation has not been exaggerated." Timonaides compressed his fleshy lips in a momentary grimace of annoyance. "That makes it very necessary to ensure that you don't have any opportunity to warn him about my devices. He is quite an exceptional man, and what he thinks are his private conversations are often invaluable. But like everyone else he has a chink in his armor—in his case, his passion for modern sculpture."

"I'm surprised that you were so ready to get rid of such a useful fellow as Loudon."

"It is a mistake to keep repeating a successful trick. Besides, Loudon was developing inflated ideas of his own usefulness. And he knew too much already."

"So by staging his murder so that I would take the rap, you could kill two birds with one stone, so to speak."

"Exactly."

The Greek had been regaining his assurance with every passing word and second, as if behind the screen of dialogue his keen intelligence had been sizing up the situation at full depth and considering the logical moves which could be based on it.

"And now that your clever little scheme has fizzled?"

"I must be grateful that you weren't content just to escape from the frame-up, somehow, but your foolish attempt to retaliate has delivered you back into my hands." Timonaides walked to the fireplace and gazed expressionlessly at the dying embers for a moment. "You have caused me great inconvenience for a second time, and probably destroyed some priceless evidence which it may be difficult to replace. I shall not waste time trying to get rid of you with any more elaborate plots." He turned to his light-haired henchman. "Since Mr. Templar has broken into my apartment and attacked me, you may shoot him. It will be quite legal."

"Here?" said the blonde man.

Timonaides shrugged.

"I don't want a mess on the carpet. Take him out in the kitchen. If there is any blood, it will be easier to clean off the floor."

The blonde man made a beckoning sign with his gun.

"Come," he said.

And at that instant the elevator doors slid open, disgorging about eight humans and a Russian wolfhound. They scattered and staggered about the hallway, opening doors and crying out for liquor and music; some of them found the living room from which Timonaides and his lieutenant had burst in on the Saint, and turned more lights on, while others came towards the study.

The invasion was so utterly unexpected, except by the Saint, that even such a professional as the light-haired thug was thrown off guard, and Simon took advantage of his stupefaction to numb his wrist with a karate chop and then to numb his brain with a follow-up of knuckles to the jaw, before anyone got hurt. The blonde went down in a corner, still feebly grasping his pistol: but Timonaides made no move to try to retrieve it. Simon suspected that the Greek was a purely cerebral type, a masterful planner and giver of orders, but one who would always leave the physical dirty work to others. In any case, like his gunman, he was temporarily too utterly dumbfounded to make a coordinated movement.

Cassie spotted the Saint, and ran to throw her arms around him.

"You're all right?" she cried. "Is everything all right?"

"You couldn't have timed it better," said the Saint.

The noise in the living room had risen in pitch. Someone had found a hi-fi stereo installation and turned it on full blast. The wolfhound was barking. A guitar started to twang in opposition, and found some vocal support. Then there were shouts of triumph as a source of liquid refreshment was discovered. There were sounds of popping corks, clinking glass, and some breakage.

The darker of Timonaides' two messenger goons came stumbling blearily out of a door at the end of the hall, clad in horribly striped pajamas and clutching a revolver, obviously still half befogged with the slumber from which the uproar must have aroused him. But before he could make his arrival tell more offensively, the lift doors opened again and the second carload of hilarious heathens swarmed out. Somewhere among them was a policeman, holding desperately on to his helmet. The desk clerk had also been somehow swept up in this wave, and now crept closely behind the constable, like infantry advancing behind a tank.

Timonaides had been standing all this time as if paralyzed, his main sign of animation being the purpling of his face, which made him look as if he was building up to burst, or to have a stroke, as perhaps he was. For what may well have been the first time in his life, he had been flabbergasted by something so unpredictably and catastrophically beyond his comprehension that he had been robbed even of his lesser reactions and reduced to something like the level of a concussed beetroot. But at the sight of the police uniform, the dam broke, and he found his voice at last—even though it was not, perhaps the commanding kind of voice that would have been desirable.

"This is the man you want!" he screeched, pointing to the Saint.

The wolfhound jumped up on its hind legs and tried to lick his face. Timonaides pushed the dog away and shook both hands towards the Saint in a thoroughly Mediterranean gesture.

"This is the man!" he shrieked. "Not just a housebreaker, but a murderer! Arrest him!"

Simon, assuming a relaxed and graceful stance, let his head move just slightly to one side.

"Did you ever hear that oldie about the pot and the kettle, Kuros?" he asked quietly.

"I have nothing to say to you," yelled the Greek. "I want you out—all of you out, and under arrest."

The policeman looked around helplessly. When he spoke his voice was hoarse.

"There's nothing I can do alone," he gulped. "They can't even hear me. I've put in a call for help."

The elevator doors opened yet again, but not to bring help. It was to emit another and even denser contingent of Cassie's celebrants, who lost no time in adding their assorted forms of din to the pandemonium. Faced with what must have seemed like a combination of earthquake, cyclone, and global insanity, even Timonaides' surviving arms-bearer was at a loss, for to start shooting in such a mob and before so many witnesses would have been merely lunatic. And Timonaides, to whom he looked for guidance, had lost all capability of giving him a lead.

"It's a good thing you're here," Simon said to the policeman. "If you weren't, this creep would be having all the rest of us mowed down by his bully boys. He's had plenty of people killed before."

"That's libel, Templar!" Timonaides shouted. "You're not only going to jail, but you're getting sued, too!"

He looked around for his men, one of whom was still far from alertly responsive.

"Don't let him out of here!" he bellowed, pointing to the Saint. "Call Scotland Yard!"

"I have a feeling you've been calling poor Inspector Teal off and on all day," Simon said. "Why don't you give the switchboard a rest. I've already called him anyway."

The elevator doors opened yet again, and two more policemen emerged and stood appalled for a moment. The clerk managed to get to them and scream a general idea of what was going on.

The uniformed men began moving against the crowd, quietly but firmly. Slowly the storm subsided. Dancers were separated. The record player was unplugged. Unruly beatniks were isolated in various parts of the room. Some of the merrymakers, realizing that the tide had turned, simply sat down on the floor and waited to see what would happen next. A few had fallen asleep, clutching one another, or embracing half-emptied whiskey bottles.

When Chief Inspector Claud Teal arrived, the scene was fairly calm.

"Now then," he said, "what's going on here?"

He spoke the words as he stepped from the elevator and swag-

gered into the living room, bearing a transitory resemblance to Charles Laughton in his celebrated role of Captain Bligh. The policemen respectfully straightened their spines, while Timonaides and his staff glared from one side of the room, and Simon and the party-goers watched from the other.

The clerk began his version of the tale.

"These people broke in, forced their way into the elevators. ."

"And they've done serious damage to my furniture," Timonaides interrupted. "I thought England was a civilized country, where a man could go to bed at night without fear of being attacked by screaming savages."

"There's going to be damage done to a lot more than your furniture before this is over," the Saint said quietly.

"You see!" bawled Timonaides. "He threatens me, even now!" Please take him away!"

Teal glowered at Simon and raised his hand to gesture for one of the officers. The Saint stepped back and relaxed against the wall.

"You'd like to catch the man who murdered Perry Loudon, wouldn't you, Claud?"

"I thought you denied he was ever killed?" the detective said.

"I'm not sure I ever said that, but anyway, it turns out now that he has been. He was killed on the orders of Mr. Timonaides, here, who happens to be the man who's been calling you anonymously. The actual stabbing was done by one of those men over there."

"Lies!" Timonaides howled. "He is telling all lies! Trying to save his own skin. . ."

Simon reached into his pocket and produced a box of video tape which he had taken from Timonaides' desk. He gave it to Teal.

"What's this?"

"It's a tape made by a television camera which Timonaides managed to get into the private office of a man named Thorpe-Jones. You've probably heard of him."

"Of course," said Teal.

The Saint continued.

"The whole thing is a blackmail scheme—Mr. Timonaides' specialty.

"Timonaides bribed Perry Loudon to incorporate cameras and microphones into certain pieces of his sculpture. Then, when Loudon began to ask for too much money, or because he knew too

much, Timonaides had him killed. There was also a man who looked rather like me, who was thrown out of a window in Newkirk Street, as your man Longbottom must have told you—"

The Greek managed to control his voice and adopt some semblance of scornful calm.

"Insane," he said, shaking his head. "There is absolutely no basis for this story. If you will investigate you will probably find that this man Templar had some personal quarrel with this Loudon and killed him himself. Now he's merely trying to drag in innocent parties in order to throw suspicion off himself."

"You'll find at least one television camera in Thorpe-Jones' club right now," Simon said. "There's also a monitoring van involved. I can give you its description and license. I'm sure it shouldn't be hard for a great detective like you to trace good concrete evidence of that kind to the man who paid for it. And in the desk in the study here, there are video tapes which came from that set-up."

Teal knew better than to take such detailed and direct accusations lightly when Simon Templar made them. They had proved correct too often in the past. The detective looked at Timonaides, who snorted.

"This is ridiculous," said the Greek.

"It's not ridiculous to me," the Saint said.

His voice had lost any trace of banter and he looked at Timonaides with piercing eyes the color of clear arctic skies.

"As you know, Claud, I've been in this snake's way before," he continued. "To get revenge, he arranged for someone to impersonate me and steal Loudon's girl. Possibly he even arranged for the girl to work her way into Loudon's life to begin with. Then, when Loudon was killed, you were supposed to believe that his old pal Simon Templar murdered him while they were fighting over a woman."

"This man is insane," Timonaides said, turning up his palms.

Teal looked at the Saint.

"If Loudon is dead, where's his body?"

"Somewhere in this apartment, I believe," said Simon.

Timonaides looked incredulous, faintly worried, and then tremendously relieved. He opened his mouth—threw back his head, and guffawed.

"Where?" Teal asked the Saint.

"Claud," Simon said reproachfully. "What did I tell you about asking me to do all your work? I don't know where, but I don't

think they've had time yet to get rid of it."

Teal turned to Timonaides.

"It would be simple to check this," he said. "Would you mind?"

Timonaides shook his head.

"Not in the least! Please." He spread his arms. "Search. Look everywhere."

Teal nodded to the uniformed men, who began dutifully trooping through the penthouse looking into and under things. Simon enjoyed the brief wait. This was one of those mountain-peak moments which belonged just to him, and for which he lived.

"A nice bluff," Simon said to Timonaides, "pretending not to care if they looked. Too bad it didn't work."

"It's a lie," the Greek said, but an awful and uncanny presentiment, born of the Saint's astounding confidence, seemed to begin to shake him. "If you do find a body, he brought it here. I know nothing about it."

"If Templar is lying, you have nothing to fear," Teal said stolidly. "We'll begin checking on the rest of his story right away."

There were several more minutes of what to Simon Templar was delicious suspense, before he heard a muffled far-off shout from the direction of the kitchen, and soon after that the first constable came hurrying back, red-faced and almost incoherent with his news.

The Saint drove Cassie back to her flat, and went upstairs with her. She fell on her knees beside Caspar and George.

"Oh, my poor boys!" she cried. "Were you worried about Cassie? Well, don't feel bad. It's all over now."

"No, it isn't," Simon said.

He pulled her to her feet.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He took her in his arms, and she stared up at him, wideyed.

"I mean you're not going to creep back into that little shell of yours and shut the door," he said. "Can George or Caspar do this?" And he kissed her gently on the lips.

She pondered his face for a minute, then slipped her arms around his neck.

Without moving away from him, she reached behind her with one foot and shoved Caspar from his sitting position so that he slumped face down on to the floor.

"Close your eyes, boys," she said. "You've just been replaced."

recruitment

by Stephen Dentinger

Hamas Same arrived on the noon plane from Washington, and took a taxi at once to the sprawling, tree-shaded campus of Southcentral University. He'd always liked Southcentral, because it had the proper university look about it. There was none of the rowdy spirit of rebellion that permeated so many other campuses these days. During the past two years he'd managed to recruit a number of promising seniors for the organization.

Strolling across the ivy-curtained quadrangle, Same reflected that there was not a great deal of difference in the recruiting methods themselves. Only the schools and the students changed. He'd be at Southcentral for two days before pushing on to the west coast, and with his usual luck he'd leave carrying at least a couple of signed employment contracts.

"Hello, Ham," someone said, and Same nodded. The

This story may disturb you. I hope it will.... It appeared in our British edition in 1966 *but, for reasons which should be obvious, I hesitated to schedule it here. Just as in S-F,* "1984" *seems very very close...* ***H.S.S.***

other recruiters knew him, of course, because their paths crossed many times during the six months of intensive travelling that preceded graduation.

The college had assigned a tiny office to each, and for weeks before their arrival the bulletin boards were cluttered with dozens of printed interview announcements. The recruiters for the most part were men very much like Hamas Same—young, vigorous, intelligent individuals who could talk the students' language and gain their respect. Same never used campus slang in his interviews, because it went out of date too quickly, but he did pride himself on being able to discuss the problems both lucidly and frankly.

"Ready for them, Ham?" asked one of the electronics recruiters.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"They're graduating some good talent here this June. Looked them over?"

Same tried to sound casual. "Glanced at a few applications." In truth, he had his eye on two seniors of remarkable achievement. One especially, an honour student named John Travers, showed great promise in the field of economics.

Same placed his cigarettes and matches near his right hand and scattered a couple of pencils on the desk. He liked this part of it, meeting young people, helping to choose the ones who might be tomorrow's leaders.

The first senior was a lumbering football player who was far from an understanding of Hamas Same's organization. He was given a few vague forms to fill out and sent on his way. Then, all at once and without preliminaries, Same was facing John Travers across the narrow interview table.

"John? Nice to meet you. My name's Hamas Same, but my friends call me Ham."

John Travers extended a muscular hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Same. . .Ham." He had a pleasant smile that Same knew must be popular with the girls.

"I think you know a little about our organization, John, and we know a little about you. This session is just to get us better acquainted."

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about June and graduation. I guess all the fellows have."

Same offered the young man a cigarette and then lit one for himself. "I'll tell you quite frankly, John, we need men like you in the organization. We're young, just get-

ting on our feet. You could move up fast."

"I. . .I'd want to know a little more about the setup."

"You read our folders?"

"Yes. But some of the language was a bit vague."

Same smiled at that. The language of their recruiting literature was indeed vague. "Well, John, we have our reasons for that. You're an intelligent fellow. I'm sure you know what the score is."

"Well. . .yes."

"We're ready to start you at seventy-five hundred. That's good money."

"Yes," Travers agreed. "But just what would I be doing?"

"Economics. Your field. Budget-planning, taxes, the works."

"In Washington?"

Hamas Same allowed himself a slight smile. "There would be a temporary period elsewhere — but then, yes, Washington."

"How about advancement? I'm going to be married and raising a family before too long."

"There's no limit to advancement. You can go right to the top of the department. That would pay around twenty thousand, as we have it planned."

"How many people do you have with you?" the young man asked.

Same lit a cigarette. They always asked that one! "We have a great many young people like yourself, and some older ones too. There are more joining us every day."

Young Travers leaned forward intently. "I'm a good man, Mr. Same. Honour student, tops in my class. I'm looking for someplace to go. Frankly, I'm looking for someplace with a fast future."

"We want you, boy. We want you badly. Seventy-five hundred to start."

"I was thinking closer to ten thousand."

"Without experience? Just out of college? That's high, and I think you know it."

"Your organization is not without its risks, Mr. Same." He smiled and added, "I might even have trouble getting insurance."

Hamas Same waved a hand in dismissal of the thought. "The dangerous work will be done by others. You'll be in the office."

John Travers thought about it. Finally he told Same, "I like it. But I'd have to get an assurance of just what my position would be. My title when we go to Washington."

Same sighed and made

markings on his pad. They wanted this boy, wanted him badly. "All right," he said. "I'll put through a call right now to our president. Wait here a moment."

There was a pay telephone down the hall. Same passed by the line of chairs where students waited to be interviewed, and pulled the booth door closed behind him. In a few moments he heard the voice of the president on the other end of the line. "What is it, Same?"

"Sorry to bother you, sir, but it's important. I'm doing recruitment at Southcentral, and I've got young John Travers on the string. You'll remember he's on our list of prime candidates."

"Yes?"

"I think he's ready to sign with us, but he wants some sort of title. Wants to know what he'll be in the new setup."

There was a moment's silence on the other end, and then, "Just how good is he?"

"Economics expert. Top of his class. A real brain. And best of all, he hasn't been involved in any student demonstrations or political groups. He's not on any FBI lists."

"Sounds good," the president said. "How about assistant secretary? Think he'd go for that?"

"I'm sure he would, sir."

"Give it to him, then. And fly him here this weekend. I want to give him the usual welcoming talk."

"Right, sir."

Same hung up the phone and strolled back to the little interview office the college had furnished. He felt very good, like a man who had just closed a big deal. He sat down at the desk and carefully lit a cigarette, letting the suspense build as he stared at the expectant face of the waiting senior.

"John," he asked very quietly, so his voice would not carry beyond the room, "how would you like to be Assistant Secretary of the Treasury after we overthrow the government?"

address: intrex, saigon

by Michael Avallone

"We will hear your report now, Cheerio," *Arrivederci* said. "The very first business of the Goodbye Club is to disseminate any information we may collect as regards these infernal Intrex people."

"Just so," Cheerio said drily, rising to his feet to face the solemn, silent group of men seated about an oval conference table. Cheerio was the movie cliche of the Englishman. Tall, stiff-backed, morning trousers and dark coat illumined with a boutonniere. His face was a careful mask of ruddy good health. Sandy mustache, monocle and military style haircut. It would have been impossible to tell his age.

Cheerio held a thin sheaf of onionskin papers in his manicured fingers. He coughed to clear his throat. It was not the sound of nerves. Merely a characteristic vocal pattern. Cheerio had no nerves whatsoever. He had ac-

There was obvious need for an organization like the Goodbye Club. The professionals needed to organize, for their own protection and for the protection of their clients. And the first problem was to do something about those damn men from Intrex. *They had to be coped with. Immediately....*

counted for some seventeen people in a span of years. Seventeen assassinations, ranging from the politically motivated to the personally involved. He was one of the most respected hired murderers on five continents.

As was every man seated about the conference table. The sunlight streaming through the high glass windows of the Hotel Caravelle in Saigon shone on *Murder, International.* The Goodbye Club was in session.

"David Seven," Cheerio said crisply, enunciating every word of his report with relish. "The American blighter is thirtyish, deceptively lean-looking and a lawyer by trade for the International Trade Experts in New York. Black belt man in Karate. Emerged from the halls of Rutgers University as a Five Letter Man. Demonstrated a facile grasp of law and forensic medicine. He works for the Trade Experts as a corporation lawyer. Only a cover, however. Mr. Seven is in effect, the head of the Intrex Enforcement Department. Rather like Gilbert and Sullivan's Lord High Executioner. He is the man to whom all destruction powers are granted."

There was a low rumble of sound from the men seated in their chairs. The rumble broke in single outbursts of declaration.

"Kill him," *Adios* of Spain said.

"Down he goes," agreed *Adieu* of France, "Sacré, but he has a record that one. He is no stranger to Paris."

Arrivederci, a prunish, dark-faced little man, rapped a gavel quickly. "Gentlemen. No vote has been called for. There will be none until our English colleague has finished his report and I ask for one. Understood?"

Cheerio's mild eyes went cold as *Auf Weidersehn,* raised a blocky, muscular hand. The Teutonic head, with the ridiculously old-fashioned saber scar on the left cheek, was as querulous as ever.

"My dear *Arrivederci,*" the German said haughtily. "Is the Goodbye Club to be denied expressions of approval or denial? Come, come. If we have banded together for a mutual interest, let us at least not play silly games of order and form—"

Arrivederci frowned at him. The group fell silent again. Even *Auf Weidersehn* shrugged but said no more. Cheerio waited patiently, fingers primly curled about his report sheets.

"I would remind our

friend from Germany," the Italian said in a voice that would have quelled any mutiny in the world, "that the express purpose of this organization *is* organization. No more loose ends, no further contracts indiscriminately — one professional against the other. Haven't we seen how our employers, the nations of the world, tend to dismiss us too lightly? To sacrifice us if it becomes expedient to do so? Need I remind you of the fate of lone wolf in the game of international espionage. Be still, you fool! This club ensures profits and work for us all, while it also is a lifeline and a guarantee of our personal necks. Am I understood? Did you think I called for this meeting at this time. in this miserable part of the world, simply because I wanted to look at your lovely faces again? I am chairman. You will listen to me or there will be no further need for a Goodbye Club and we can all go our separate ways again—without further discussion."

Adieu spread his hands. The tips of his elegant mustache seemed to elevate.

"We will do as you say, my friend. Let *Cheerio* continue."

Arrivederci surveyed the table once more. His eyes roved from *Adieu* of France to *Auf Weidersehn* of Germany to *Adios* of Spain to *Cheerio* of England and then to *Farewell* of America.

"And you, *Farewell.* What do you say?"

Farewell, a wide-shouldered, sunny-faced man with a mop of blonde hair smiled. "You called it, partner. I'm with you. Let's have the rest of it."

Arrivederci sat back in the chair; in the chair that dwarfed him and waved a hand. "Go on, *Cheerio.*"

The Goodbye Club tensed in their chairs as the Englishman continued in a high, clear voice.

"Miles Running Bear Farmer. An architect. Former Rhodes scholar. A full-blooded Cherokee. He is Seven's associate and is also employed by the International Trade Experts. Together these two men have accounted for some ten of us between them. My estimate of them, after this survey, is conclusive. They would be a decided future hazard to our project and should be eliminated as soon as possible. Therefore I make that recommendation now and suggest it be voted upon as soon as possible."

Cheerio shuffled his papers together and sat down. He produced a filter-tipped cigarette from a spaded silver case and tapped it casually for emphasis.

Farewell chuckled. It was an unfamiliar sound in the confines of such a grim meeting.

Cheerio reddened. "Funny?" he said stiffly. "I fail to see. . . ."

"Easy," *Farewell* said lightly. "Don't go into a tailspin. You picked two prime targets. I agree one hundred percent. Yes, it is funny. And now I see why all the ruckus and haste with which we were all rushed down here. No co-incidence, I suppose that Seven and Farmer are in Saigon now performing some task for this Trade Experts outfit. The cover is the U.S. Government. Farmer is working with the Army engineers on that new Pa Phang project. Mr. Seven is officially a consultant on the legal status of the resettled Montagnards. Nice. Very nice. How does somebody pull off a kill or two with some hundred thousand GI'S on deck? Will somebody tell me that?"

Cheerio smiled archly, beaming at *Arrivederci.*

The little Italian smiled too.

"Farewell," he muttered. "That is the beauty of the thing. In a war, who will notice a pair of sparrows falling in the sky?"

Farewell angled his big head, skeptically.

"I'm still listening. And while we're on the subject, who gets elected to pick these characters off?"

Arrivederci showed his teeth, reaching for his gavel.

"We will vote now," he said. "And then you will understand a great deal more. . . . ."

Outside the high windows, the Vietnamese sunshine blazed fiercely.

It was the first time the sun had come out in a week.

Each man of the Goodbye Club subconsciously considered it an omen of good fortune, as if Nature herself was blessing the union and *raison d'étre* of an organization of assassins.

Arrivederci ran his tongue over his lips, eyes on his assorted colleagues. "I shall now call for a vote. Will somebody move that the next official act of the Goodbye Club will be to dispose of Intrex agents David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer?"

"So move," murmured Cheerio.

"All those in favor?"

A chorus of ayes filled the room, low-voiced but affirmatively enthusiastic. *Farewell* grinned and closed his eyes.

Planned murder in the very midst of a war that threatened to be global struck him as funny. Very funny, indeed.

Like the lunatics taking over the asylum.

2.

"Bac si" Miles Running Bear Farmer said, winding a strip of torn shirt tail about the nasty wound in his left wrist. "Medic to you, American pig."

David Seven sniffed the Vietnamese air from the protective covering of their shroud of banana and bamboo trees.

"Beats me how an American Indian, with centuries of trail and tracking blood in his veins, can get so careless as to scratch himself on a lousy little jungle fern."

Farmer winced, the grimace implying that he thought more of Seven's jab at his honored ancestry than the fierce pain of the thorn which had suddenly spiked him as they ploughed through the jungle. He finished the crude bandage and peered out across the wall of elephant grass that towered on all sides of their position.

"Captain Holmes of the American Army, Baker Company, Third Cavalry, is going to be plenty sore at us, Dave. Taking off on our own for a look-see at the war."

"I detest Captains. Always have. They're always polishing their bars."

"That's a little unfair, isn't it, Dave? He's fighting the war. We're still civilians. How unpatriotic can you get?"

Seven turned to face his colleague. The blue eyes that were the most compelling asset of the lean, handsome Seven face were now two chips of cold fury. Not even the usual bantering rapport that characterized most of the duologues of the men from Intrex could hide Seven's irritation.

"I know you're all doubled up with pain from your scratch and aren't thinking straight. You will recall, Architect, that you and I, Lawyer, were sent here presumably to arrange a few matters for the United States. I shall also remind you that we now both suspect that dear Captain Holmes may be responsible for the loss of eighteen soldiers yesterday. All because he apparently panicked and sent them

walking into a nice bevy of claymore mines. He should have known better. Also, it strikes me as odd that a Captain who has been here since the beginning should get so careless in combat!"

"Battle fatigue maybe. It happens to the best of them."

"Viet Cong hanky panky maybe. Anyhow, I want to scout the spot. We could find something."

"Yeah," Farmer said drily. "A whole mess of Victor Charlies waiting to shoot our fannies off."

Seven shook his head. "I doubt it. The Command Post is just five hundred yards behind us. The VC ran yesterday. And kept on running. You okay now?"

"I'll live. And right now I wish we lived somewhere else. This jungle stinks."

Without further words, they both pushed out from the cover of bamboo and banana trees, approaching the elephant grass cautiously. They both fanned out, in approved military style. A flung grenade would not be able to account for both of them. Indeed, thanks to their official mission and status, despite Captain Holmes' disapproval, for all of the world to see, they looked like but two more American soldiers in the bush. They wore the green fatigues, combat boots and M-1 steel helmets. Captain Holmes had even provided them both with M-16 rifles, canteens and a handful of grenades each. Unhappily, they had neglected to carry their First Aid kits, thanks to Seven's sudden notion to venture off into the jungle. Hence, Farmer's crude bandage for his wound. Miles couldn't blame David too much. The deaths of the eighteen dogfaces had upset his partner badly. His suspicious Intrex nature — the compleat spy as it were — plus his humanity had gotten the best of him. Also they were due back at the Command Post by 1700 hours which was but forty five minutes off. Failure to appear for night call would bring Holmes' wrath down on their heads.

A crow cawed in a tree. The late haze of the burning sun that had blistered the Command Post area all day long hung over the jungle like a curtain. One could imagine a steaming pot. The faces of Seven and Farmer were dotted with perspiration. The rifles had become heavy and cumbersome.

Overhead, a Huey chopper clawed magically through

the skies, heading North. Other than the cawing crow and the faint muffle of the chopper's motor, the jungle was still. The Huey vanished.

They entered the elephant grass, stalking like Indians. Farmer's immobile mask of a bronzed face was as vigilant as a hawk's. Seven stepped lightly and easily, his lean body cutting a noiseless swath.

After some fifty yards, they paused.

"There," Seven whispered. "That's the spot."

He indicated an opening in the wall of grass. They had reached the end of it, facing a wide clearing where another banana tree stood like some relay station, offering peace and comfort before the very next sea of reeds taller than a man.

Farmer studied the area, his eyes speculative.

"Hard to pin anything on Holmes. Baker Company forayed here. They scouted from where we're standing now. So he sends two squads in. And they hit the mines. There were three Victor Charlies in the grass behind the banana tree. Using mortars and grenades. Fortunes of war, Dave."

"Maybe," Seven said. "But eighteen Joes bought it and Baker Company fell back. A whole company held up by three lousy VC's. I didn't like it yesterday and I like it less today. He shouldn't have rushed those guys in until he had this spot checked out for mines. Mighty peculiar."

"Baker Company is coming back this way in the morning. I got that scoop from the First Sergeant."

Seven frowned. "Lousy odds for a lousy war. Three Victor Charlies for eighteen Joes and a loss of a whole day and maybe one thousand yards of ground. No, Miles. Something stinks here all right and it isn't just the jungle. . . . ."

He never did finish the sentence.

The high whine of a sniper's bullet cut across the top of the grass. A hideous sound. Seven and Farmer plummeted to earth, the M-16's poking upwards from an easy port. Again the rifle whined. Seven heard Farmer cry out.

Now, he could see the betraying movement from the dense branches of the banana tree in the clearing. It would have to come from there. It was the highest point of observation for at least five hundred yards.

Seven leveled the M-16 and depressed the trigger.

The chattering, thunderous outburst of noise and killing lead thundered into the topmost part of the banana tree. Seven raked the weapon in a savage arc. He didn't let up firing until he heard the choked cry and a rag doll of a man flopped down from the branches of the tree, disappearing into the earth, out of view.

Then he turned to Miles Running Bear Farmer.

The architect was on his knees, rifle discarded. The agony in his face was unmistakeable. He was clenching the wrist that had suffered the fern injury.

"Miles—"

"Not my day, David. Damn wrist is killing me. They got poison plants in this jungle or something—did you get the Victor Charlie?"

"Never mind him. How bad is it?"

"I'll live I said. But we better go back for that *bac si* I wanted. All of a sudden I have a splitting headache and my mouth is dry and—what a party pooper I am."

Seven took his good hand and hauled him to his feet. He didn't like the sudden chalkiness of Farmer's normally bronzed face.

"Come on, buddy-o. Back to base for you. Take us maybe ten minutes. Think you can hold out till then?"

"Me hold out."

Now he knew Farmer wasn't feeling good. The laughable Hollywood Indianese was a sure sign. Still, the outing hadn't been a total loss.

They hurried back through the elephant grass, less cautiously than they had come. Seven pushed ahead, breaking a path for Farmer.

"You see? Sniper in a tree. How in hell did he get back up there? Why didn't Holmes post sentries out here, even if he did give up the ground? We walked through without running a single interference. Damn fishy. All the way."

Miles Running Bear Farmer chuckled.

"What are you laughing for, Tonto? They may have to cut off your arm. Jungle rot and all that."

"Just thinking. Captain Holmes. Baker Company. Just hit me. And you making like a Sherlock. You got to admit it's a wry situation. The Medic may be a Dr. Watson."

"Yeah, wry. Real wry. Don't talk so much. Lean on me. Come on. You're too heavy to tote through this stuff."

They reached the compound in less than fifteen

minutes.

As they broke from the grass into the clearing, challenged by a PFC on duty with a carbine, Miles Running Bear Farmer collapsed. A hastily summoned medic, pulled from the aid station in the very heart of the area, made a rapid diagnosis.

Seven tried not to worry as the pink-faced, rather corpulent corpsman with the red cross hat busied himself with Miles. In the end, he motioned for a stretcher and two more dogfaces trotted over to remove the unconscious Farmer to sick bay.

"How bad is it, Doc?" Seven was kicking himself now for hauling his partner off on a spy mission, no matter what his suspicions were.

"Ten kinds of poison sap in this part of the world, friend. Your pal has some of it in his system now. Think we caught it in time. See how his wrist swelled like a balloon. We don't know all the names—I can only guess —but we'll do the best we can."

The medic hurried off. Seven fumed, dug a cigarette from his fatigues. The compound was thriving with activity. A jeep wheeled on the corduroy road, loaded with soldiers carrying rifles and grenade launchers. A Corporal and a squad of men bearing rolls of telephone wiring ran by, heading for the elephant grass that walled the Command Post on all sides.

"Where the hell were you, Mister Seven?"

Seven whirled at the bark of voice, recognizing hatred of the civilian, authority and disapproval, all in one flash.

First Sergeant Alvin Tyler, hawk face grim, leathery and sweaty, glared back at him. Tyler was as tall as Seven and the breadth of his shoulders, burdened down with cartridge belts, ammo bandoliers and grenades looped to shoulder harness straps, was incredible.

"We went for a stroll, Sergeant. Scouting. Any harm in that?"

Tyler moved in closer so that his sweaty face was inches away. "Sure. Why not? Country picnic. You can walk in and out of this war any time you like. Damn fools. You stay put. You don't go anyplace without telling me first. Clear?"

"Clear, Sergeant. What's new?"

Tyler controlled himself. "Oh, nothing at all. But for your information, Captain Holmes bought it while you were gone. Sniper. Hit him in the skull while he was standing right in front of

his tent. Damnedest thing I ever saw. I wish to God they'd got a nosy civilian like you."

Seven hung onto his anger. He'd been in too many situations, not all of them sweet, to ever let white heat dominate his actions.

He drew evenly on his cigarette, still concerned about the fate of Miles Running Bear Farmer.

"I'm sorry. Who's in command now? Lieutenant Walker or that Carson kid—"

Sergeant Tyler reddened.

"No. We got a fast replacement. Coming down from Saigon. Right out of the brass section. A Captain Farwell. Captain Thomas Farwell. He was with rear echelon but they're filling in with him pronto."

The sergeant didn't say Saigon; he said 'say-gone' like all soldiers did.

"I'm warning you, Seven. One more breaking orders and I don't care how damn official Uncle Sam rates you, I'll ship you out of Baker Company so fast, you'll be picking scabs from windburning off your kisser for the rest of your life. Understood?"

"Understood, Sergeant."

As a lawyer, David Seven knew when to yield on a point. He said no more. Satisfied somewhat, Sergeant Tyler lumbered away, bellowing some orders about sundown to some soldiers on the perimeter of the compound.

Seven shook his head to himself. The jungle walk had been silly and pointless, what with Miles getting hurt and now Captain Holmes gone. Traitor or incompetent or battle fatigued veteran, it made no difference now. For Captain Holmes, the war and the world was over.

He thought only briefly of the new man, Captain Farwell, as he headed for the sick tent, to see how Miles was coming along.

3.

Arrivederci and *Adios* and *Adieu* were enjoying a brief respite in the modern, lavish cocktail lounge of the Hotel Caravelle. All about them, Saigon's social world eddied and flowed. Bright French voices filtered, cigarettes winked in the dim environs and cocktail glasses and dishes and cups clattered. A medley of Continental sounds. Not even the far off thunder of the dogs of war could be heard barking in here. Saigon, really Little Paris, with its concentration of French expatriates and businessmen who had hoped

to find commercial gold in the narrow streets of the city. South Vietnam, of which Saigon is the capital, is one of the three independent states of what was once known as French Indo-China. The others, of course, are Laos and Cambodia.

The Caravelle, a jewel midst decay, is air-conditioned, with a roof garden and a fine view of the harbor. The Majestic and the Continental are its rivals but, to most of the world, the Caravelle represents the face of Saigon.

Most people in Saigon speak French as well as Vietnamese and many will also understand English.

Arrivederci, Adios and Adieu, serenely safe in the large, well-appointed atmosphere, decided to speak German as they dined. Low, unhurried, quiet German. It would have been difficult to hear them in the din. *Arrivederci* was quite at ease on the subject of their table being 'bugged' or wired for sound. Their waiter was one of the nameless, faceless employees for whom the proper payment of the correct number of *piasters* accomplished all forms of miracles of loyalty.

"The cinema," *Adieu* said in the German that contrasted exquisitely with his dainty French face. "Or perhaps the Thong Naut Theatre. It would be relaxing after yesterday's heavy conference."

Adios, nursing a glass of sugar-cane juice, flung him a baffled look. "At a time like this? Nonsense. I have no desire to watch an English dubbed film or one of the Viet exercises in ceremonial dances and music. It would be a bore."

They looked to *Arrivederci* as if the little, prune-faced Italian held the key to their problems of entertainment.

Arrivederci smiled. His dark face glowed happily.

"The Vietnamese *Times* was interesting this morning. Most gratifying news story. An American Captain was killed by a sniper. Baker Company, Third Cavalry. A Captain Holmes. The United States regretted losing him. He won many medals."

Adieu and *Adios* exchanged looks. Their leader studied the Caravelle menu as he continued.

"He has been replaced by a Captain Farwell. My. The fowl items should be most delicious. They have a sauce here that does wonders with game—" *Arrivederci* folded the menu and laughed.

"Steps One and Two are

taken. Seven and Farmer, you'll remember, were reported to be with the Baker Company, as cover for their assignment. So, in effect, our friend Farwell has them in his sights as of this moment."

"*Sacré!*" *Adieu* marveled, forgetting himself and lapsing into his native tongue. "But that was quick work, my friend."

"You talk of entertainment to while away the hours of waiting," the Italian sighed. "Why not a pedicab after dinner and then we can see the zoo and the museum? Rich and spicy food demands some exercise to aid digestion."

"*Adios* chuckled. "I should like that. Sitting in a cab while some Vietnamese dog runs his feet off, carrying me through his beloved city. *Auf Weidersehn* took one when he left for the Cho Lon Docks."

Adieu was impatient to get back to the matter at hand.

"And Farwell—should he succeed or fail—"

Arrivederci pinned him with a look.

"Keep in mind that he knows the rule. We chose him for the assignment because the victims are his countrymen. He is the best one of us for the job. He will not fail. If he does, this will be no concern of ours. Failure is certain to ensure his own death. Stop worrying. He will succeed."

Adieu sipped his own drink nervously. "I hope so, my friend."

"When I dispensed with *The Little Foxes* last year, dear colleague, I told Reynard I was no longer available for employment. What could they do? They and the rest of the international cartels in our field. They had to let me go. They couldn't catch up with me. So—the Goodbye Club—is my answer. An organization of professionals. It is the only way we can be safe. Ridding ourselves of threats like Mr. Seven and Mr. Farmer, is common sense. There will be others, later."

Adios frowned. "Yet—who *does* pay us? Who will give us the price of these heads?"

Arrivederci looked surprised at the question. Then he too shrugged. He broke a bread-stick between his assassin's fingers.

"You idiot," he said softly. "I approached all buyers. I got my price. Indeed, Reynard himself—will pay five hundred thousand dollars apiece for each of these peo-

ple. They have been—shall we say—occupational hazards to him, many times in the past."

"*Reynard!*" *Adieu* gasped. "The greatest one of them all."

A lovely Vietnamese girl, gorgeous in a form-fitting cheongsam, all yellow, gold and orange hues, padded silently to their table, to see about their order.

Arrivederci showed his teeth to her.

"*Bellissima,*" he said, happily. "Bring us first another round of drinks. It is a day of celebration."

"Like *Tet?*" the girl smiled, saying it in English.

"Yes. You might say that. Like *Tet.* Your Vietnamese New Year. We do not have to stay home for there has been no death in the family.

"It is good," the girl said, bowing over the glasses as she reached for them.

"Yes," *Arrivederci* said, "it is very good indeed."

4.

Captain Thomas Farwell, U.S. Army, had a sunny-face, wide shoulders like Sergeant Tyler, and a mop of thick curly blond hair. The untidyness of his scalp made him seem less imposing than an American Army Captain might be.

That was David Seven's first impression of the man who dispatched a PFC to find him barely one hour after he reported to the compound to take over for the late Captain Holmes.

The tent was pleasant, comfortable and large. It was lined with boxes of M-1 ammo, a bare deal table, some kerosene lamps and a radio set mounted on a canvas-backed table. Night had closed over whatever portion of the Vietnamese real estate that Baker Company, Third Cavalry occupied. As far as David Seven could learn from his own map and a good sense of direction, the company was positioned some fifty miles north of Saigon, along the Dhong Hai River. Victor Charlie was on the run, as usual, but he kept stopping frequently to plant his claymore mines, snipe, launch mortar attacks and generally foul up all talks of peace plans.

Even now with the Vietnamese night as dark as ink, the distant tinny noises of some local ruckus were going on. There had been a jet airstrike at dusk, lighting up the darkness with exploding fires that burst like stars. The

war was as immediate as the last minute.

Seven, on his way into the tent, had passed Lieutenant Walker, leaving with a patrol of ten grim-faced Joes on their way into the bush to scout the jungle up ahead, in preparation for a push forward by all of Baker Company. Walker was a nice kid, an insurance salesman from Rochester. But he had been unlucky enough to be unmarried and twenty three when his call came.

Captain Farwell closed an Army Field Manual as Seven walked into the tent. They were alone. Farwell leaned back on his camp chair and put his big arms behind his head.

"Hello, Seven. Have a seat."

"That's okay, Captain. I'll stand."

"I want you to know you're welcome here. As welcome as I understand Holmes made you. Sorry about how the First Sergeant seems to feel, but you're a civilian. You understand."

"Sure. I'd feel the same way in his place."

Farwell smiled. "You're a lawyer they tell me. And a fine one. And your friend, Mr. Farmer, builds bridges and things. How is he by the way?"

Seven smiled, liking the easy-going way of the man.

"A little fever and a lot of pain. But he'll pull out. I took him walking and he got cut by some damn jungle plant. The Medics cleaned him up though. He'll be on his feet in a day or so."

Farwell shook his head. "He'll have to be ready tomorrow. Or we'll leave him behind. You too, if that's the case. But if your work is finished here, I could provide you transportation back to Saigon." He didn't say 'Say-Gone' the way the soldiers did.

"We can't go back as yet. But I'll get Miles on his feet. Don't worry about us. We won't slow you up."

"I'm not worried," Farwell said. "Just wanted you to know the score."

Seven nodded, studying the man before him. The Captain's bars, looking like the accelerator trips of a .30 calibre Browning air-cooled machine gun, were gleaming like silver. Brand new. There were ribbons on the officer's tunic indicating service in the European Theatre during World War Two. Also the red Bronze Star ribbon, the red white and blue Silver Star Medal ribbon and the Soldier's Medal ribbon. This was a neat blue ribbon with

a center-piece of vertical red stripes against a white background. It's a very unusual medal and a tough one to win, under any circumstances.

"Soldier's medal, huh?" Seven smiled. "Tough getting one of those. Mind telling me where and when?"

Captain Farwell shrugged. "Munich in '45. I got lucky with a grenade and wiped out a machine gun emplacement."

"Nice shooting. I'll turn in now, Captain. Thanks for the talk."

"See you in the morning, Seven. We'll be clearing out right after breakfast. As soon as I get Lieutenant Walker's report."

"Roger."

Seven saluted him softly, even though there was no requirement to do so, and spun on his heel. He exited from the tent with rapid strides.

The compound was dark, but fortunately, his own billet was but a stone's throw away. He found it easily in the gloom, went in, and didn't bother with a light. He flopped down on his cot and stared up at the grey fly of the tent. He couldn't sleep. His mind was too busy with wondering about Miles Running Bear Farmer, the peculiar mystery of Captain Holmes' conduct. And the problem of the new commanding officer, Captain Thomas Farwell.

Captain Farwell, he decided, had either been in rear echelon too long or had had a slip of memory.

In any case, it was disturbing.

Still, the man *had* won an awful lot of medals. Distinguished himself in combat as it were. A long time ago. Too long ago?

Seven fell asleep still wondering.

The jungle slept too. There was no more thunder from the foliage, no startled cries of disturbed birds and insects. No illumination flares exploded in the dark, signalling the beginning of another Vietcong raid.

Baker Company, Third Cavalry got a good night's sleep for a change.

5.

In the morning, right on cue, Baker Company, moved out. The tents were struck, supplies were crated and packed, and the company of tired, sad soldiers lined up once more for the continuance of a deadly jungle campaign that had seen them on the go for three wearying,

painful, toll-taking months. Lieutenant Walker had struggled back to base with his patrol, fatigued and worn to the bone but with a pleasant report for a change. He had lost no men and the only casualty was a private who had sliced his right cheek on a spiked memento left behind by the retreating enemy. A simple, ghastly trap. You stepped on a sapling. It broke beneath your boot, triggering a razor-sharp blade that could cut your head off. Fortunately, the trap had been sprung improperly. The soldier had escaped with a vicious cut.

Baker Company moved out, the men in two long lines of combat readiness. Jeeps and other vehicles had been left behind; to be used by the outfits moving up from rear points of vantage. The vehicles would serve no use in the elephant grass and only slow up the advance.

Seven's head ached from hearing Sergeant Tyler bawling orders of command and personal aggrievance. Yet, Seven had his hands full with his partner. Luckily, Miles Running Bear Farmer, if one credited his remarkably durable heritage, was on his feet and able to navigate. The endless gauze around his wrist, ending in a sling arrangement for his left arm, at least didn't limit his locomotion. For which Seven was profoundly grateful.

The outfit made good time, considering the density of the grass. It was a grey, hazy day. You could hear an occasional jet break the sound barrier but it was impossible to see anything. The tropical undergrowth and air was beginning to steam. To emit clouds of mist and vapors. The temperature was drenched with perspiration.

"March to June are the worst months up here, Dave," Farmer vouched on the sweaty trek." Always ninety degrees or better."

"Do tell." Seven rasped, batting a buzzing yellow fly away from his ear. "Turkish baths I don't need when I'm fully dressed and in my right mind."

"Dig up any more ideas about the late Captain Holmes?"

"Uh uh. De mortuis and all that. He's dead so it doesn't matter. I'll keep my eye on this new man."

"Farwell?"

"Uh huh. He doesn't know the first thing about the medals he's wearing."

"What does that mean?"

"Tell you later. Dear Sergeant Tyler approaches."

It was true. Tyler had halted the columns, or Farwell had. Baker Company was taking a ten minute break. The men leaned against available trees or squatted on the dry earth, lighting cigarettes. A hum of heat and a droning noise filled the air.

Sergeant Tyler paused before them, his horny right hand gripped about the stock of a sub-machine gun tucked in the hollow of his shoulder.

"Captain wants you forward. On the double."

"Our pleasure," Seven said. "Come, Miles."

Tyler glowered, turned and advanced the way he had come.

When they reached the head of the columns, they found why Captain Farwell had halted at this juncture.

He was lying on a hummock of ground that fell away sharply into a clearing. He had a pair of field glasses anchored to his eyes surveying the panorama before him. Seven and Farmer flopped to either side of him, keeping their heads down.

"You called?" Seven asked.

"Yes," Farwell said, without taking his eyes off the glasses. "Take a good look below. Then you can see for yourself in the binocks."

They did.

Baker Company had cleared the jungle. Far below the crest of ground on which they were, lay a valley. A valley that rose in terraces of rice paddies and swampy undergrowth. To the South lay an enormous bunker of hilltop, jutting like an ancient monolith into the mists that hid its very top.

There was no sign of so much as a farm animal. Not a cow or pig. No life was visible to the naked eye.

"I've seen better on post cards," Seven offered.

"Now take the glasses," Farwell said. Farmer waited, watching the terrain below.

Seven adjusted the lens to his own eyesight, the scale of mils and numbers on the twin glasses easily distancing the objects revealed. The close-up of the valley revealed nothing more. It was mute, barren and unmoving. As if the world had ended.

He swept the glasses from East to West in a wide range. And came up with same unalterable zero. Nothing.

"Well, Seven?"

"Not a sign of anything. Miles." He handed the glasses to Farmer.

"It's not natural," Farwell muttered. "Almost a mile of space. Wide-open. Rice pad-

dies. Nobody in sight. Not even a small dog."

"Meaning?"

"A trap. Got to be. Victor Charlie is down there somewhere just waiting."

"Where, for instance? There's no place to hide. It's open. Wide open."

"The rock formation is my only guess. You see how it is. I commit the company to the valley. We go down. We're sitting ducks. A crossfire from those rocks or a strike from the air and there's no place to hide."

Seven pointed. "That rock formation is pretty far off, Captain. But—if you say so. What are you going to do? Go around?"

"Take three days to skirt the valley. And we have to get over to Dong Tu. In that direction. I have my orders. I have to meet up with Hotel Company to re-inforce them. They got chopped up badly last week."

"What do you want *us* to do?"

Farwell stared at them both. A faint smile played over his mouth. "You read my mind. Look—we're not that far from the CP we just left. I want you both to go back. You're officially civilians and it wouldn't do to get you hurt out here. I won't spare any of the Company. I want you to be runners. Go back to base and ask for an airstrike on this valley. So we can go in without getting slaughtered—"

Seven's eyes narrowed. "Why can't you radio for that?"

Tyler spoke up from behind, where he had been standing and taking it all in. "We had two radios. Both conked out. Damnedest thing. Never happened before. We're out of touch with everybody and everything right now."

"Too bad," Miles Running Bear Farmer said.

"Will you do it?" Farwell asked them both. "I can't order you too—but—" He left it hanging.

Seven smiled. "Consider it done. Guess it's a break at that. By tomorrow night, we could be getting our Turkish baths in the Caravelle."

"That's the ticket," Captain Farwell laughed. "This is important, Seven. You could be saving our hides. We need that airstrike."

"Check. We'll shove off right now."

"The way back should be clear. But you can't be sure with infiltration and all. Victor Charlie has been known to come around by the back again. Here. Take

these extra grenades. And a sub-Thompson. It will be worth it."

Sergeant Tyler was handing the indicated arsenal to Seven and Farmer with unexpected friendliness. He was almost grinning, as if now everybody was the best of friends.

Seven kept his face blank. "Mark a map for me," he said, "where this valley is so I can tell Air Command. Otherwise you boys will get plastered by mistake."

"Good thinking," Tyler roared. "You'll make a dogface yet, Seven."

In the end, David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer trooped dutifully back through the bush. As they passed the columns of lounging soldiers, the men waved and smiled to them. The Intrex agents were loaded down now with extra grenades fastened to their shoulder harnesses, two M-16 rifles and the sub-machine gun.

"Back on the island of Manhattan," Farmer said, "we sure would get the horselaugh from sweet Samantha Follett and your ever-loving secretary Cathy Darrow. Look at us. Toy soldiers."

"Don't mention them," Seven snarled. "I'd give my eye teeth to be sitting in their laps right now. Even Sam's."

Soon, they had left the last of Baker Company and disappeared into the bush.

Captain Farwell dug into his field jacket for his ration cigarettes and produced a pack of Chesterfields. He offered one to Sergeant Tyler who took the white cylinder gratefully. They both lit up, cupping their hands against the sudden wind sweeping against the face of the hummock, up from the valley.

"Nice going, Farwell," Sergeant Tyler said. "Made sense all the way and not even HQ would question such an action."

Farwell nodded. "We've planted snipers along the route. If the snipers don't get them, those faulty grenades will."

"How'd they trick up the grenades?"

"The fulminate of mercury train which explodes the grenade is practically nonexistant. Almost as soon as the pin is pulled, the grenade will detonate."

"Right in their hands?" Tyler grinned. "Nice. Very nice. Almost as much fun as disposing of Holmes. He was beginning to get wise to me."

Captain Farwell drew con-

tentedly on his cigarette.

"Peaceful out here. The valley. No war. I didn't realize that *Arrivederci* had planned things so well. Imagine. An Army Sergeant in the combat zone itself, working for an organization like ours."

Tyler shrugged. "I'm a professional. I like killing. Like you. The little Dago understands me."

Captain Farwell, for all of his professional respect for *Arrivederci's* planning, decided never to turn his back on Sergeant Tyler.

In the meantime, he wondered just how long it would be before the mission would be completed. The first mission of the newly-formed association.

The deaths of two very troublesome agents.

6.

"Would you mind telling me what you're doing? Sun getting to you, David?"

They had paused at the marshy bank of a small pool of stagnant water in the very depths of the jungle. Miles Running Bear Farmer had watched in amazement as his partner evidenced all signs of losing his marbles.

David Seven had unslung the extra hand grenades handed over to him by Sergeant Tyler and one by one, flung them into the pool of green, scummy water. Then wordlessly, he had reached over to Miles, unhooked the similar grenades from his partner's straps and repeated the Sandy Koufax routine. Farmer was still necessarily one-armed.

As each grenade disappeared into the waters with a *thuckkk!* of sound, Farmer's chagrin deepened.

"I suppose you want the sub-Tommy too?"

"I do indeed."

"You can have it, of course, but please tell me why. These B-A-R-'s are enough if we get stopped but what's going on in that suspicious mind of yours? First Captain Holmes and now this—"

"Miles," Seven said softly, taking the machine gun from his partner and chucking it the way of the grenades with deep relief obvious in his face as it too vanished, "I was not about to trust your life and mine to a man who gave us grenades who doesn't know what he should know about U.S. Army medals."

"Stop talking in circles. Spit it out."

"If Farwell was here, I'd spit in his face. Those grenades and the gun were

probably booby-ed to go off as soon as they were used by us. I wasn't going to waste time finding out how. It doesn't make any difference. Farwell is a phony, maybe Tyler too. This whole business of sending us back is a trap. Two radios conking out is too much co-incidence too. How convenient can you get I ask you?"

"David Seven," Farmer said stonily, "if you don't tell me what the hell you're talking about, I'll shoot you right now and never talk to you again."

"Okay, okay. Last night I met Farwell for the first time. His tunic was loaded down with fruit salad. Silver Star, Bronze Star, theatre ribbons and—the Soldier's Medal ribbon."

"So?"

"So I asked him where and how he won it. So he told me he earned it in combat in Munich wiping out a machine gun gizmo or something. Don't you smell bad air?"

"Wait a minute—" Farmer paused. "Soldier's Medal. Combat. Hell, no. You can only win a medal like that in a non-combat situation. Like saving a guy from drowning or something. It was the War Department's solution for honoring soldiers who did brave things while *not* under enemy fire."

"Mr. Farmer, you are so right. Now what bona fide Army man wouldn't know that? Who could mistake it, either? No—that was the first tip that maybe Captain Farwell was not the regular old Army Captain he was supposed to be. A real bad slip. Can't be excused not any way at all. So—"

Farmer gazed around carefully, his M-16 at high port. "So you figure if Farwell is a phony, this situation is a phony and so might the grenades and tommy gun."

"You're doing fine. Now—continue. If Farwell is a phony, who is he, what is he and why is he a phony? Here in Vietnam of all places. And why does he want to get at *us?*"

"Farmer scowled. "What do we do now? He could get those boys all killed."

Doubtless. But plunge further into deduction. It all happened so fast. Holmes gets knocked off by a sniper. Farwell is immediately on hand to take over. Too quickly. I'd say someone else in Baker Company has dirty hands. And that his orders could be faked."

"Tyler? Or Walker?"

"I'll bank on Tyler. I got a thing about loud-voiced,

cruel big men. Walker's too young for this sort of foxy play. Added to which, Farwell could be here solely to stop our clocks specifically."

"*Us?* Are we that important?"

"I'd say so," Seven said, without pride. "We're going back."

"Back where?"

"To Baker Company. To hell with this reporting back to base. Farwell isn't on the level. Maybe we can prove he isn't. Those guys with him need us. They don't need any air-strikes on a valley where you couldn't hide a cockroach."

"*That* much did occur to me, Mister Seven."

"Knew it did. Let's make tracks. If Farwell is a phony and sent us back, he had a reason. Probably a lot of noisy reception committees along the way."

They worked back through the high grass, running rapidly and smoothly, the M-16's ready for any threat. Baker Company on the ridge overlooking the valley was only two miles ahead. Seven had not wanted to put too much distance between themselves and Captain Thomas Farwell, United States Army.

Further down the trail, behind them, two snipers, waited in the concealing branches of a banana tree for the two Americans who did not come.

Who would never come.

7.

Lieutenant Walker was restless. He didn't know why. Still, there it was. The new Captain, Farwell, had decided to send the civilians back to radio for an air-strike and Walker was at a loss to understand why. True, the two radios were dead. Odd about that. No telling in Vietnamese weather though. Motors, machines and wires all got the dry rots in the damn heat and dampness.

But waiting out Seven and Farmer while sitting smack-dab atop a valley in broad daylight, even if it was misty, was a little thick. Walker had spent six months in the jungles of Vietnam and to him, the thickets, the foliage and the elephant grass were the safest places. Victor Charlie did too. It was just plain combat sense. But Farwell insisted on keeping Baker Company anchored on the high ground. If some MIG's decided to fly over—Walker restrained a shudder. Hell, what could a Louie tell a Captain?

Tyler was no help. The

First seemed to side with Farwell all the way.

"Top, what's going on?" Walker demanded as Tyler prowled in his vicinity.

"Captain's waiting for air support. Then down into the valley."

"Bad business. There's nothing down there. There's nothing up here. We're sitting and waiting for trouble."

"You want me to tell the Captain that, *Sir?*"

"Go soak your stripes, Sergeant. Tell him myself."

He found Farwell on the rise, sitting down, eating a can of C rations. The Captain was smiling, an odd expression considering their position. Or so Lieutenant Walker thought. Below their rise, the nearest soldier was twenty yards away.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Walker."

"We ought to move out. Bad spot this. If planes—"

"We're staying put, Lieutenant, until Seven and Farmer get through. We'll know when our own jets strafe the valley."

Walker bit his lip. Argument was useless, he knew. "Roger, Captain."

Farwell smiled and then frowned. Lieutenant Walker was staring past his shoulder as if he had seen a ghost. The young officer's mouth was an incredulous "O" of astonishment. Farwell cursed, reaching for his carbine and craning his head around to see.

Then he too gawked. A chill raced down his spine.

Standing before them, in full defilade, with the vast panorama of the valley behind them, stood David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer. Each of them had his M-16 trained directly on Captain Thomas Farwell.

Their faces alone would have prevented an outcry. Seven's was frozen with hate and Farmer's was the impassive redman's of legend.

It would have been impossible for anyone else in Baker Company to see them unless they walked toward the rise. Including the nearest soldier, lounging twenty yards away.

Lieutenant Walker could do little more than stare stupidly. In all his life at the front, nothing like this had ever happened.

"Farwell," David Seven said coldly. "Stand up and show me your dogtags. I want to see the name and identity of the man you killed to get that uniform. Unless it was provided by your friends, whoever they are."

"This—" Farwell gasped,

in a choked voice—"is ridiculous—"

"You don't know what the Soldier's Medal is, maybe you're just as careless about dogtags. Hear me good, Lieutenant Walker. This man is an impostor. Ask to see his dogtags."

Farwell shuddered, realizing an omission that would not be easily explained away. A soldier must die before he would ever think of not wearing his dogtags. His ID. Name, rank, serial number, religion. The Graves Registration boys insisted on it.

Lieutenant Walker rose to an unusual occasion. He hadn't earned his battlefield commission because he was stupid. He was surprised to hear himself say: "A reasonable request, Captain Farwell, when a man has an M-16 trained on you. Show him your dogtags. I'd like to see them too."

The moment hung.

Frightened, trembling, waiting for deliverance, Farwell fumbled open his field jacket, groping for the ID tags that he knew weren't there.

At that moment, Sergeant Alvin Tyler, ventured back up the rise. Smiling and whistling some hillbilly tune. He saw Seven, Farmer, the guns, the whole impossible situation. His face erupted with alarm. He didn't wait for explanations.

He brought his machine gun up from his middle, jerking it in a savage arc toward David Seven and Miles Running Bear Farmer.

Baker Company was brought to its feet by the thunderous, bursting chatter of machine gun fire, shattering the stillness of the surroundings for all eternity.

8.

Arrivederci gazed around the conference table in the *solon privee* of the Hotel Caravelle. No one was looking at him. *Adieu, Auf Weidersehn, Adios* and *Cheerio,* were all staring at the single unoccupied chair at the table.

Grey light filtered in through the high windows. The sun had not shown its face for days.

Arrivederci tapped his walnut-colored gavel for attention; his prune's face was puckered unhappily.

"One of our members," he said in his faultless, unaccented English, "is missing. He will not attend today's meeting. Or any future meetings. *Farewell* has been scratched."

Murmurs raced about the table.

"Do not imagine this is the end of the Goodbye Club," the chairman said in a grating voice of doom. "There is still hope for us. One failure does not a collapse make. We will simply have to re-double our efforts, condition ourselves for these tragedies. Score one for *Intrex*. But I make a pledge to you. *Intrex* has not heard the last of the Goodbye Club."

Silence filled the room. No one stirred.

"I, *Arrivederci,* promise you that."

No one would dare disagree with him.

9.

David Seven placed a transatlantic call to Miss Samantha Follett of the International Trade Experts from the lobby of the Continental Hotel in Saigon. It had been impossible to find rooms at the Caravelle.

Miss Follett sounded as cool, calm and collected as ever. Her voice was briskly professional, businesslike yet still unalterably feminine.

"It's good to hear from you, Mr. Seven."

"Thank you. Likewise I'm sure. Just wanted you to know that Mr. Farmer and I will be jetting back to mad Manhattan in the morning. Which means we will be seeing you sometime Wednesday afternoon."

"Fine. I trust you worked out your plans as you wanted?"

"Yes. I'll spell it out for you Wednesday."

"I'll look forward then. Goodbye, Mr. Seven."

"Goodbye, Miss Follett. My regards to Miss Darrow."

As Seven shouldered from the glass-enclosed booth, he found Miles Running Bear Farmer curled up on the long lounge in the lobby reading a copy of the Vietnamese *Times.*

Farmer looked up.

"And how is Good Sam?"

"Gooder than ever. Anything in the paper?"

"Yeah. A certain Lieutenant we know, name of Jeremy Walker, B Company, Third Cavalry, was awarded a Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry in action. Seems he took Baker Company into a big nest of Victor Charlies and broke it up with some fancy military tactics."

"Good man, Walker. Knows a phony when he sees one. Fast thinker too. We never would have pulled off that dodge on top of the

valley if he hadn't pitched in."

Farmer folded the newspaper, placed it under his arm and stood up. "I've been thinking about that. It was pretty incredible, you know it. Telling some lieutenant in the middle of a combat zone that his Captain is somebody else. And then having to shoot the Sergeant like that. Hell, we both dropped Sergeant Tyler before he got us and Walker himself took care of Farwell when he went for the .45 at his waist. But ye Gods—put yourself in Walker's place. He was taking our word and doing a lot of things just because we told him. *We.* A pair of civilians. If he'd been a different kind of guy, we never would have gotten out of that mess. Baker Company would have taken us apart with their bare hands and left us for the crows."

"Don't second guess," Seven said sternly. "In the first place, it isn't necessary. In the second, Walker must have had his own doubts to take the initiative like that. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember. Also I remember something else."

Seven sighed, looking for the Coffee Shop. "All right. Get it off your chest. What now?"

Miles Running Bear Farmer smiled. One of his infrequent smiles. It lit up his whole face.

"Just suppose—mind you only suppose—suppose that Captain Farwell *was* wearing dogtags. A set of dogtags that named him as Farwell. What would have happened to your big bluff then? And if you were Lieutenant Walker, what would you do to a pair of civilian characters running around making wild and slanderous charges against an officer and gentleman of the United States Army?"

Seven controlled an involuntary shudder.

"You know, Miles, there are times when these post mortems of yours do not bear idling and mulling over. If I suppose that, then I must also suppose we would not be standing here safe and sound in the Caravelle about to have a nice friendly cup of coffee. Forget it, will you?"

"It's forgotten, David. Honest Injun."

David Seven looked mollified. At that moment, a tall, fantastically lovely Vietnamese girl, hardly missing colliding with them, eased herself by with a dazzling smile and vanished into the Coffee Shop. Her slit-skirt, high

heels and raven black hair mounting a facade of improbably lush contours seemed to backon back at them, invitingly. A scent of exotic jasmine lingered in the air.

"Coffee, Mr. Farmer?"

David Seven smiled, extending the crook of his arm.

"I'm with you, Boo Boo," Miles Running Bear Farmer said.

Together, they raced each other to the Coffee Shop.

"CO-ORDINATION", BELGRADE STYLE

A number of quiet reassignments took place within the Yugoslav diplomatic service, earlier this year, as a result of investigations into the activities of the "Co-ordination" committee, set up by Alexander Rankovic, Yugoslav Vice-president and secret police chief, who were so zealous in their anxiety to co-ordinate available information that they even bugged President Tito's office and villa.

"Co-ordination" was entrenched in the Foreign Office and had its representatives in most Embassies abroad. Their job, and here of course Rankovic was simply following the classical pattern, was to report directly to the Vice-president on the activities of the Ambassador and his staff. Koca Popovic, a friend of Tito and Foreign Minister for more than ten years, who has now succeeded Rankovic as Vice-president, was one of the victims of the committee.

"Co-ordination" men would intercept telegrams from abroad and if it did not suit the Vice-president's plans, these telegrams would never reach President Tito or the Foreign Minister. The organization appears to have been in close contact with the Soviet security services.

The President's decision to abandon all criminal proceedings against Rankovic and his aides, in interesting contrast to the attitude of the government on other issues, is said to have "startled" people in the country.

Rankovic and his closest aides were freed from house arrest, and it was decided to quietly demote the committee's men and restore to responsible positions many of Rankovic's victims in all Ministries, particularly in the Foreign Office. It was explained, with a perfectly straight face, that a spectacular trial would poison the atmosphere at a time when it was more important to push ahead with major reforms and to attract, and perhaps win over, "dissident elements" within the country.

never forget a face

by Avram Davidson

Now. . .the last thing—pick up his glasses. "D.Gould, Optometrist", it said on the window of the little shop. He went in and reached for the receipt in his pocket as the tinkle of the bell brought the proprietor forward.

"Oh, I don't need the slip," Mr. Gould said. "I never forget a face. The name is Schneider, isn't it?"

"No, no: Snyder." He fought down his impatience as Mr. Gould picked up the right spectacle-case and laid it on the counter. In another minute Snyder was gone. He never encouraged talkative sales-people, and certainly not *now*. Never forgot a face, the man said? Snyder guided his car through traffic. He told himself that it couldn't matter less. No one was going to come asking the optometrist, whose shop was over on the other side of town, if he knew anything. And if he *was* asked, what could he tell? Nothing...

Mr. Gould insisted he never forgot a face... The ability to remember, if not the name at least the face—to be able to flip through the file cards at the back of your mind and to remember, while you're still talking, the circumstances of the last meeting—is a useful ability in politics and in organizational work. And in business. But what if you get confused?

Snyder paid the toll at the bridge, one car in a long line of cars—nothing to attract attention or remain in the memory—and in a few minutes was out of town. He relaxed, let his hands rest easier on the wheel.

All of America lay before him, and his life would be very different from now on. For two years he had been working with foreigners, and it had almost been more than he could stand. Hulking tall Mr. Elbakh and fat little Mr. Maqmul—the Middle East Importing Company, they called themselves—with their odd accents, had gotten on their book-keeper's nerves from the start. They were constantly talking to him, keeping him from his work, and pressing him to drink strange cups of tea and stranger cups of coffee, to eat peculiar-looking sticky candy. Oh, they had paid him well enough, Snyder admitted, but why not? He was an American, wasn't he? And they were making money by selling their foreign junk to the Americans, weren't they?

Well, now *he* had their money—had thirty thousand dollars of it, anyway—and serve them right. Let them go back where they came from, if they didn't like it.

The suburbs across the river began to thin out. Where Snyder was headed for was a long way from the city. No one there even knew he had worked in the city, just as no one in the city knew he spent his vacations where he did. He didn't tell anyone his business. If they wanted to tell him theirs, well, he might listen—if he felt like it. That was how he had learned old Hillman wanted to sell the place. It was part hunting-lodge, part motel, and with $30,000 he could make the down payment and have plenty left over for operating capital. And no one would ever know.

The Middle East Importing Company knew only that he was a good book-keeper; the fools didn't even know enough to have had him bonded. The dingy residential hotel where he'd lived knew only that he paid his rent on time. And there were no "friends" to gabble information when the police came calling. No one even had a picture of him.

The first year with Elbakh and Maqmul he had learned the rhythm of the business. The bulk of the sales had been to wholesalers. The stuff had to arrive in plenty of time to find its way to retail outlets in time for the

pre-Christmas sales. In one month over $30,000 in checks had gone to Edward Fenwick, Inc., the customs agents. So Snyder had established an account with a bank well away from the neighborhood of his office. As Edward Fenwick he had deposited cash—all his savings, withdrawn from another bank. He had continued to deposit his pay, taking just enough to live on. *Then,* when the busy season began this year, he had deposited the checks of the Middle East Importing Company—made out this time to Edward Fenwick without the "Inc." added. Neither Elbakh—always talking of his wife in the old country—nor Maqmul—forever babbling about a new waitress or a taxi-dancer he had fallen in love with—neither had noticed the difference.

Now he had the money, neatly wrapped and lying in the back of the car.

It was Friday. On Monday they would miss him. It might easily take them till Wednesday to decide to call the police. And what could they tell them? Nothing. They didn't know anything. *Let* the police send out a circular for a Robert Snyder who looked like twenty million other people. To old Hillman and all the others there in the mountains he was John Williams. Why *should* he have given them his real name? It was none of their business.

Snyder's eyes began to tire, as they always did when he had been driving a few hours. He put on the glasses. This brought back to his mind what the optometrist had said: "I never forget a face." And then had called him "Mr. Schneider." Fool! Driving along, with $30,000 in the car, Snyder reflected on how many fools there were in the world. This thought had always comforted him. Somehow, this time, it failed to. His eyes began to bother him. He should have put on the glasses sooner; he found himself squinting and peering. Dusk was always a bad time for him anyway. The road ahead—it had turned into a small-town street—seemed full of shadows. All at once he became aware, as the shadow ahead popped suddenly into focus, that it wasn't a shadow at all, but a pile of rocks. He spun the wheel—not quite in time.

Big Bill McCallom was one-half of the two-man police force in King's Crossings and he was starting across

the street to put up the red lantern at the excavation when he heard the car coming. His practiced ear told him it was going a bit too fast, and he turned to gesture to it. It took only one look to tell him that it was not going to clear the rock-pile, gesture or shout as he might, so he put down the lamp and waited the second or two for the crash. The front of the car went up, then down. The trunk broke open and a spare tire rolled out. Glass shattered. Men came running from the diner across the street. Bill walked slowly over.

He assured the fry-cook that the driver wasn't going to die.

"Call Doc Guernsey," he said. "Go on, now—" he added, as the man hesitated.

The fry-cook said, "Hey, Bill. The back's full of money." Bill pressed a clean handkerchief to the bleeding forehead of the driver, who was moaning feebly, and looked into the back.

"Sure enough," he said. A box had burst open, scattering envelopes full of money. "Go *on*, now, make that call to the Doc. One of you other fellows leave me see a envelope from that box." He looked at the firm-name and address printed on it. Then he looked at the driver. "'Middle Eastern Import Company,' huh?" he said. "I never heard of importing *money*. And *he* ain't no Middle Easterner. . .Guess I better make another phone-call."

Mrs. D. Gould stood behind the counter in her husband's shop, tapping her foot. "What kept you so long?" she demanded, as he hurried in. She opened the bag of groceries and poked among the contents. "*White* bread?" she said, sharply. "I told you whole-wheat. *Anchovies?* When did I ever ask for anchovies? *Sardines* is what I told you—"

The bell tinkled and an elderly man came into the shop. He reached into his pocket.

"Oh, I don't need to see your slip," Mr. Gould sang out, turning to his shelves. "Mr. Snyder, isn't it? I never forget a face."

The elderly man brought out a spectacles-case. "Not Snyder," he said. "*Schneider.* And I think you give me the wrong glasses, too. I can't see a *thing* with these here."

Mr. Gould hesitated, confused. His wife spoke up,

please turn to p. 115

requiem in five flats

by

W. Sherwood Hartman

Ever since I'd gone to work for the Narcotics Division of the Treasury Department, I'd been expecting excitement. Contrary to popular opinion, there was little of that. . . . Most of the time, the work was downright boring. At other times it was either disgusting or sickeningly brutal, or both. I was seriously considering resigning when I was called in to see the head man in Washington. . . He'd noticed in my records that I had been a piano player and he wondered if I'd kept my hand in. I had. I still play for my own amusement whenever I get the chance. . . . . Then he explained why I had been called in.

It seemed that they had recognized the futility of picking up the pushers and little men, and were trying to trace the source of the flow of heroin into the east coast. They were pretty certain that ninety percent of the dope was coming in

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Working for the Narcotics Division of the Treasury Department can mean that you will get to know more about what passes for the human race than may be good for your peace of mind. You will see brutality—you will see greed—you will see wife betray husband. And you may make music.

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through the Philadelphia area. Saturating the port area with agents hadn't uncovered the slightest clue.... Then they had noticed a similarity in the movements of all the known distributers. Sooner or later they would all make a pilgrimage to a night spot called "Club Ramona" on the pike south of Camden. Some of the smaller operators only made the trip two or three times a year, while the big boys were there once a month or more. The boss figured that the "Club Romona" was the clearing house for the whole east coast and that someone there was the top man in the syndicate. There was a sensible reluctance to break in cold and take a chance of lousing up the whole deal. The boss wanted someone on the inside to take a good long look and pinpoint the operation. I was to be the pigeon.

I went to New York the next day and picked up a good bass man and a real fine guitarist. We rehearsed for a few days and worked club dates for two weeks around the island. Then we went on the road for eight weeks through upper New York State and by that time we had acquired a smooth professional supper club style. It was the most fun I'd had since I'd been on the narcotics squad.

Then we were booked into the "Club Ramona" for a two week stand.

The room was sedate, elegant, and done with a mastery of good taste. Three of the walls were draped in purple velvet and the fourth was frosted with panels of glass that filtered soft blue light into the room. The ceiling was black and starry with tiny lights that focused each table below it in a lilac halo. The carpet was deep maroon with a plush pile so dense that it was like walking across a good putting green in the spring. There was no bandstand. A Steinway grand stood in the corner beside a small oak and teak inlaid dance floor. The acoustics were excellent.

The first night at the Club Ramona was full of surprises.... The owner's name was actually Ramona.. Ramona Clarice...and she looked like no other nightclub owner I had ever met. I judged her to be on the late side of her middle twenties. Her hair was ash blond, her complexion flawless, and the total of the upper and lower measurements of her figure would have been par on any golf course.

When we were about to finish the first set, she came to the piano and said, "Play Ramona in the key of F." Then, as we were halfway through the second chorus, she slid onto the stool beside me. I felt heady with the warmth of her perfume in my nostrils and the touch of her firm flesh against my thigh. She moved toward the center of the stool and I relinquished the piano to her. She played as good as she looked. No fumbling or hesitation. She had the authority of a real pro. She played through the entire intermission, then signaled us back on with "Ramona" and I slid onto the stool beside her and took over..... That's the way it went the whole time we were there. The boys and I would play for forty minutes and she would fill in for twenty.

I spent the intermissions that first night getting acquainted with the help around the place. Leo, the headwaiter, was stockily built and talked with a slight accent that I couldn't identify. He appeared to be Ramona's second in command... Alan, a waspish little man with a lisp presided over the cash register and his eyes followed the cigarette girl like a hungry ferret... Alma, the cigarette girl, was built like a voluptuous Petty girl and the "Bunny" type suit she wore was taxed to the ulmost to contain her. There was no bunny tail on the rear of her uniform. That would have been gilding the lily.... The bartenders were all pleasant, but none were very talkative. On the face of things, it seemed to be a pretty normal operation.

We finished the last set at four in the morning. I closed the piano and the boys covered their instruments and we said good-night and left. We were staying at a motel about seven miles south of the Club and we stopped at a diner along the way for coffee and a sandwich. While we were sitting there, Leo and Ramona came in and joined us. Under the hard white light of the diner, they both looked different. Leo had a tight look around his eyes and a thin pink scar along the line of his jaw under his left ear.... If the knife that did that, I thought, had been an inch lower, Leo wouldn't be sitting with us tonight.... Ramona looked different too. She looked even more desirable under the unflattering lights. My insides were trembling as she sat beside me.

After all my years of knocking around, was I going to fall for a dame that was a prime suspect in a high powered narcotics ring? It didn't make any sense at all, but I couldn't keep my eyes off of her.

Then Leo started talking and I revised my opinion of his being second in command. "Ramona and me were talking on the way over here," he said, and he put his arm around her shoulder with an easy possessive gesture, "and we decided to pick up your option... We like your music. So, if it's all right with you, I'll have Ramona call your agent tomorrow and we'll change the contract to run indefinitely with a two week cancellation clause for either party... What do you say?"

I looked toward my two side men and could almost hear the wheels clicking in their minds.... Location! No traveling, close enough to go into New York on their day off or to go down to the shore.... They both nodded. Of course, it fit my purpose to a T. I could case things at my leisure without pushing...I nodded, too.

"That will be fine with us. We do have a booking to follow this one, but I'm certain the agent can get a sub for us for that job. I think it's great, and thanks."

Then I felt a jolt of electricity surge through my leg. Ramona's hand found my knee under the table and squeezed. Her voice was husky and my mouth felt as dry as sand in the sun. "You boys play real fine," she said, and it didn't sound the least bit trite with her eyes locked on the same radar beam as mine. She excused herself and went to the ladies' room.

When she came back we finished eating and had another cup of coffee. Then Leo grabbed all the checks and headed for the cashier. I helped Ramona with her mink stole and she slipped a small piece of paper into my hand, touching her finger to her lips in a gesture of silence... I shut up.

We thanked Leo for the breakfast, then went on to the motel. As soon as I was alone in my room, I opened the note. "Call me at one tomorrow. Ramona." she had scribbled and the phone number was printed below. I didn't sleep much that night. With all the coffee and thoughts of Ramona, I couldn't unwind. I lay awake and began reminiscing.

I guess my old man had a right to be disappointed in me. He came from the

old country where music and musicians command a lot of respect and he had wanted me to be a concert pianist. About all I can ever remember doing when I was a kid is practicing on the piano. I was coming along real well, but when I reached my sophomore year in high school, I kicked over the traces. I was six-two and weighed one-ninety by then and I loved football with a passion. So I played fullback on the football team instead of piano with the high school orchestra.... The old man wouldn't talk to me for a long time after that, but when I was named All State in my senior year and was offered a scholarship at Penn, he relented. If I wasn't going to be a great pianist, at least with college I had a chance to make something of myself.

I didn't want to quit playing altogether, so I formed a group in college and we made our spending money by playing for dances and college affairs. It was jazz and I knew the old man didn't approve of that, either, but I knew, and so had my teachers, that I didn't have that special something that makes a virtuoso. I did have one talent that set me a niche above most musicians... I have perfect pitch. Any time I hear a note, I can name it without going near a piano keyboard. I don't know if I was born with the ability or if I grew into it, but it was there. Sing a note and I can tell you what it is; rap on the tin lid of a pretzel can and I'll tell you what note it is closest to... That's about my nearest claim to fame as a musician.

I finished college just in time for Korea. After that was over, I went to law school under the GI bill. When I graduated, I still didn't feel like settling into the routine of a law office, so I took my present job. This time it promised to be interesting.

I was up at eleven the next morning and put through a call to Washington. I asked for a complete rundown on Ramona Clarice. They had it all there and it didn't sound too reassuring.

Ramona owned the Club lock stock and barrel. The whole thing was in her name, free and clear. Where the money came from, nobody knew. If she was a front for someone, it was my job to find out who.... I was also informed that she was the owner of a forty thou-

sand dollar home about two hundred yards in back of the motel where I was staying as my instructions had specified. It was right on the river and she had a boat docked at a pier in her front yard that cost as much as her home. It was a converted PT boat that had been turned into luxury, but still retained the fury of twin Allison engines under it's hull.

I hung up and felt half sick at my stomach. There didn't seem to be much doubt. Ramona was in forty fathoms over her pretty white neck. I drove up the road to the diner and had breakfast. Then I went back to the motel and called the number she had given me. Regardless of what I had learned from my phone call, I still had butterflies like a high school boy on his first date while I waited for her to answer.... Her voice was as purple smooth as the velvet drapes in the club. I could almost taste her perfume over the phone.

"This is Bob," I said, still uneasy. "You gave me a note last night."

"Ummm, I remember.... Would you like to go on a picnic?"

"That sounds like fun. Where should I meet you?"

"At my house.... Where are you staying?"

"At the Lamor Motel. It's about seven miles south of the club," I said.

"Why, that's wonderful! You're right in my back yard.... Just follow the lane aside of the motel. It comes right into my place.... And don't bother with your car. It's only a minutes walk. I'll explain later... Hurry now, I'm getting hungry."

I hung up and legged it down the lane. It was a dirt road lined with scrub pine on either side as it curved away from the main highway. Then it ended in a black topped loop in front of her house. I caught my breath as I stared at the place.... It was a lowslung redstone rancher with a wide entrance that was framed by generous boxwoods that skirted the front. I heard the piano playing "Ramona" as I walked through the front yard and I didn't bother to knock.... She was wrapped in a pink terry cloth robe and the belt tied around her middle only emphasized her figure. When I stepped into the room, she got up from the piano and moved into my arms and kissed me. I responded with more than normal enthusiasm and would have liked to continue

the diversion, but she moved away after the first kiss. "Let's get out of here," she said. I followed her through the kitchen and picked up the lunch basket that was waiting on the table. We went down the walk to the pier and got into the boat. She started the motors as I unfastened the mooring lines. Then she eased away from the slip and headed slowly toward the channel markers. When we got to the deep water, she leaned her head back, shrilled a scream of sheer pleasure toward the heavens, kicked both throttles wide open and we knifed through the river like a roaring banshee as we headed toward the bay. I sat back and enjoyed the ride.

We went for about twenty minutes, then she eased back on the throttles and turned into an inlet on the Jersey side. She cut the motors then, and after we drifted to a stop, she pulled a lever and dropped anchor.... She shrugged out of the robe and turned away from the wheel to face me. She was wearing a bikini and her shape must have been what the designer envisioned when he created that type of bathing suit.... She was breathtaking!

"How about a swim before we eat?" she asked.

I had to swallow twice before I answered. "Honey, you've caught me unprepared... You said a picnic. I didn't bring swimming trunks."

"There's a couple pairs in the cabin. You can change down there."

I went below and found a pair that I could keep on with the help of a tight drawstring and went back up on deck. She had put the ladder over the side and was already in the water. I dived in after her and we splashed around like a pair of energetic dolphins for a while. Then we climbed back on deck and sat down to lunch.

We talked between bites of crisp fried chicken and cold potato salad.

"You said you were going to explain about why I shouldn't bring my car down to your place," I said.

"That's because of Leo," she shrugged as though that explained everything.

"What about Leo?" I pressed.

"Well, you see, Leo's been with me ever since I opened the club and I don't think I could have made a success out of the place without him. He knows the business from beginning to end.... And he's jealous... Not that he has any right to be, under-

stand? He's just an employee like the rest, but I think he's in love with me... I need his help and I depend on him, so I've just gone on letting him think that he might get through to me in time... I guess I'm sort of being selfish, but I do need him... You can understand that, can't you?"

The innocent query in her soft brown eyes made it sound almost logical, but even as I nodded understanding I felt the bite of the drawstring of the borrowed shorts gnaw into my middle. I didn't like the feel of wearing another man's pants. Then she leaned forward and kissed me and the taste of chicken mingled with an unidentifiable flavor in her lips. My mind was beyond reason. It sunk into a tight balloon in my stomach and said the hell with it.

We finished eating and stretched out on the fore deck to soak up some of the warm sun. I was easing into a fuzzy sleep when she asked me to rub some sun-tan lotion on her back. The straps of her halter were laying loose and she was face down with her arms folded under her head. I rubbed, my fingers tingling as they touched her tender firmness.. Then I felt a surge of strength in her back and I knew that she was going to turn to face me. At the same moment I saw a flash on the shoreline that looked like the glint of sun on metal! I put both my hands on her shoulders and leaned my weight against her. "Lay still, damn you!" I hissed. "I'm just a working musician. I have a living to make! Now you lay there until I get down to the cabin and change and when I come back up, you have that bra on and keep it there! Do you understand?"

She stayed put, but I heard a choked sob as I got to my feet. I hated my size at the moment, visualizing the target I made from shore. I tensed my back against the impact of a high powered rifle bullet as I made my way to the cabin, but it didn't come. I still didn't breathe easy until I was below... That glint I had seen had been the sun glancing off a rifle barrel! I'd seen it too often in Korea to be fooled, but what was happening? Was she trying to set me up? If so, why? Was she trying to bait Leo with me as the lure? I didn't know, but I resolved that from here on in, I would tend strictly to the business at hand and let

nothing get in the way.

She had the motors running and I heard the winch pulling up the anchor before I had my clothes back on. I didn't hurry and by the time I came back up on deck she had the boat back in the channel and was heading up river wide open... She pulled into the dock like an expert, reversing the engines at exactly the right moment and easing the boat into the slip with hardly a nudge. I tied the lines as she swept past me thinlipped and redfaced with anger. I walked around the house not knowing what to expect, but there was no one between me and the motel. I locked the door behind me and fell onto the bed like I'd been sapped. The swimming, the food, Ramona, and the tension had been too much. I slept like a baby for three hours. Then I got up and shaved and showered. I winced as the hot water stung my back. I'd been in the sun too long, but I could have been burned worse.

The guys rapped on my door at seven and we went out to eat. Then we headed for the Club and I didn't know what to expect when I walked through the door... It was like nothing had happened. Leo was smiling; the bartenders were smiling; Alan was smiling; the cigarette girl was smiling in an enchanting variety of places; and Ramona was as sweet and gracious as she had been the night before. The whole atmosphere was so pleasant that I began to doubt that the afternoon had been for real... I took a deep breath of relief and we went to work.

The hardest part of this assignment had been the briefing. I'd had to memorize a list of faces from photographs and was expected to report if any of them showed up at the club. That night I recognized two that were on the list.

Phil Olanski, better known as Oily Phil had dinner early in the evening. He operates a string of filling stations in Pittsburg as a front for his real business and is the picture of respectability, complete with the ever present cigar in the corner of his mouth. He seemed to be fascinated with Alma in her bunny suit and bought two packs of cigarettes, tipping her each time. Then Oily Phil left. I was off at the time and near the cash register when Alan took his money. As far as I could see, nothing had been passed except Phil's money.

Abe Kline, an operator

from Richmond came in a little later, and I have to admit, I didn't get to watch him too closely because it was intermission time and Ramona had just slid onto the stool beside me. "Come to my place after work," she whispered sotto voce into my ear.

"You're dead set on getting me killed, aren't you?" I hissed back.

"You don't understand! It'll be safe. Wait outside. When you hear me play "Ramona" everything will be clear... Please!"

I started to wonder if it might have been the sun glancing off an old tin can that afternoon, or maybe it had just been some kid with a twenty-two out target shooting. Warm perfume can play hell with my resolutions. Besides, when a woman like Ramona says *please*, I'm a dead duck! "I'll be there," I said and left her at the piano for intermission. Leo was sitting with Abe Kline then and I watched Alma's gyrating rump as she walked away from their table. Then Abe left. I still hadn't seen anything passed. If this joint was supposed to be a clearing house for a dope ring, I couldn't help wondering how it was being delivered. I began to wonder if the boss hadn't sent me here on the figment of somebody's imagination.

I begged off of going for something to eat after work that night and went back to the motel alone. I waited for a half an hour then I walked through the darkness of the lane to Ramona's. There was a dim light in the living room and I heard the soft strains of "Ramona" on the piano..... The sky was turning to an easy orange with the sunrise when I got back to the motel.

I slipped into a satisfied sleep and it was late in the afternoon before I called Washington. I told them about Abe Kline and Oily Phil being there the night before. I also told them that I hadn't seen anything passed and that neither of them had been out of the room or out of my sight the whole time they were there.

Then I was informed that one of our men had tailed Oily Phil the whole way in from Pittsburg. He had been on the same plane and had been sitting behind him for the trip. Another of our agents had taken over at the airport in Philly and followed him across the river to the Club Ramona. He'd made no stops in between. He was

followed from the club back to Pittsburg and when he got off the plane our men picked him up and he had a package of uncut heroin on him that was worth roughly seventy thousand dollars! It was obvious that he hadn't made the round trip to Philly and back just for dinner. Not with all that junk on him. He must have picked it up at the club, but I couldn't figure when or how. There was nothing I could do except watch and wait.

I checked with the office every few days from there on and things started to slip into an easy routine. I had nothing really new to report until six weeks had passed. Then a definite pattern started to form in my mind..... There had been no interruptions in my afterhours dates with Ramona. I'd continued leaving the motel after work and when I heard the piano playing "Ramona" she would come into my arms. But there had been three different occasions when our afternoon boating picnics had been cancelled. Each of these times her excuse had been that she had promised the boat to Leo so that he could take some friends fishing.... I had no argument with this, but then I noticed that after each of Leo's fishing trips, there would be a flood of the faces that were on my mental file coming into the club.

The last time that Leo was going to take some friends out fishing, I left Ramona at dawn and instead of going back to the motel, I found some cover about three hundred yards down the river from her place and waited. When Leo took the boat out at eight thirty he was alone as he headed toward the bay.... Things were starting to add up, but I still didn't have all the pieces. I went back to the motel and took a hot shower to drag the damp morning cold out of my bones. Then I dressed and drove into Philly. I went to a newspaper office and checked the shipping news for the dates when Leo had used the boat. At first it made no sense, then the whole thing suddenly sprung into focus. On every date that Leo had used the boat, there had been a Greek freighter docking in Philly later in the day, and in every instance, the last port of call had been Havana! Leo had been intercepting the freighters somewhere down the bay and the package had been dropped for him to pick up.

I called the office and passed this gem along, then I got a real cold jolt.

The word had come down from upstairs that we had to move in and crack down real fast. They were very apologetic about pulling me off the case when I was getting so close, but they had knocked off five of the Club Ramona's customers the previous night. They had waited until the pigeons were close to their home base before they were hit, but whoever was in charge of the operation was certain to put two and two together.... My instructions were to pull out immediately.

I sucked it in, but I didn't like it. I still didn't think Ramona was involved and I was going to find out regardless. They could go to hell with their orders! I was fuming with rebellion as I drove back to the motel, then I got another jolt. Someone had broken into my room and had taken the place apart at the seams. They'd taken their time and done a real thorough job. They'd even ripped the lining out of my suitcases. I checked three times and found nothing missing, then I noticed that the calendar wasn't on the desk where it belonged... I didn't think much of it at the time until I remembered that I had checked each date that Leo had used the boat on that calendar.... I was in trouble, but I still couldn't walk out. I had to know about Ramona!

I took my shower and dressed. Then I went out to the car and got the Magnum from it's holster under the dash, tucked it under my belt and headed for the club. The boys were already there and ready to go to work when I arrived... Leo was just as smiley as ever, but he looked a little nervous. Alan seemed to lisp more than usual and Alma's normal twitch had turned into a tic. Ramona was the only one that seemed to be completely herself.

It was in the middle of the third set that I finally realized how they were making deliveries and it slapped me in the face like cold jello. It didn't seem possible that I had missed it!

A guy whose face I had memorized came in for dinner. He was smoking a pipe and when he bought two packs of cigarettes from Alma, the whole thing was clear.... Oily Phil had been smoking cigars and had bought cigarettes from Alma! Alma had cigarettes, and then she had *cigarettes!*

Heroin in neat packs. Luckies, Kents, Chesterfields; you name it—Alma had it!

I knew it was useless to try to place a call from the club. They had a line on me and a move like that would only tighten the noose around my neck. I'd have to play out the string.

When I sat down beside Ramona to take over for the last set, she whispered, "Tonight?"

I shivered. It would have been impossible for anyone to have such anticipation in her voice and eyes and not be sincere. I would have staked my life at that moment that Ramona knew nothing about the operation she was engulfed in. "Tonight," I nodded.

I sweated through the last set and felt as though I was stark naked as I walked across the nearly deserted parking lot to my car.... There's no defense against a slug in the back..... Nothing happened.

I drove back to the motel and changed into other clothes. Then I waited through four cigarettes before I walked down the lane toward Ramona's. When I was about fifty yards from the house, I slipped between the pines and moved silently in their shadow the rest of the way. I stood in the cover of the pines and listened to the crickets as I looked over the front yard.... Nothing moved. It was almost too still..... I waited, hardly breathing. Then I heard the piano. I started across the lawn and was in the open when I sensed that something was terribly wrong. I couldn't put my finger on it, but my spine turned into an icicle. Then, as I reached the first step of the entrance, I realized that she was trying to warn me! I dived sideways into the cover of the boxwood trees and heard the rasping cough of a machine gun as a slash of slugs ripped into the stone wall above my head. I scrambled to the corner of the house and got to my knees just in time to see the shadow of Leo running towards me with a burp gun in his hands. I cut him down with one shot from the Magnum.... Then I felt the sting of stone chips on my face as a bullet smashed into the wall beside my head. I fired at the flash, then fired again as Alan moved toward me. He collapsed and slid into the sod. I waited for a moment, but there didn't seem to be any more....

I moved around the corner and looked through the

french doors. Ramona was still playing the piano, tears streaming down her cheeks, and Alma was standing behind her with a revolver pointed at the nape of her neck... I fired, and I'll never know if Alma fired at the same time or if it was reflex action that made the gun in her hand go off when my bullet hit her, but when I got through the doors and into the room they were both dead....I went back outside and was sick.

I sifted the thing through my mind the next day while I drove to Washington. Leo and his crew must have been alerted by so many of their customers getting rapped after visiting the club and had arrived at me by a process of elimination. A phone call to New York and a few hours of investigation would have cleared my side men. They were obviously nothing but musicians, but a tracer on me would lead them nowhere so they must have figured me as being the finger man. They'd watched me and when they saw how close Ramona and I had become, they must have figured that she had got wise to what was going on and had called for the fuzz. Then they had laid the trap.

I explained the whole thing to the boss while I was writing up my resignation.

"I don't understand," he said. "You say you were just ready to go into the house when you knew it was a trap. How did you know?"

"Ramona told me while I was crossing the lawn.... I have perfect pitch and she knew it.... They were forcing her to play "Ramona", but she had always played it in F before. This time she was playing it in D flat. That's the key for "Body and Soul" and it's also the key for funeral dirges."

(continued from page 101)

loudly. "Just one minute, Mr. Schneider—*I'll* take care of it for you." She turned to her husband and hissed at him: "Go on, get away from here! *White* bread! *Anchovies!* 'Never forget a face.' You'd forget your *head* if it wasn't fastened on your shoulders."

inside job

by Deborah Crawford

Jake slipped into the factory building with the early shift, carrying like most of the other men a tin box that might have contained lunch and a change of overalls. He let the throng carry him past the time clock and over to the elevators. The clock he had not punched read two minutes to eight.

He squeezed into an elevator and was lifted creakingly to the second floor, where most of the others poured out. At the third he emerged, casually, and made his way across a floor of typewriter-clacking girls and into a complex of corridors. Several men, overalled workers and white-shirted management eyed him with looks that said *Who?* but then mindful of meetings and workloads rushed on. With all deliberate speed Jake made his way in the direction of a particular room, the location of which had been firmly mapped in his mind.

Jake was a professional with the pride of the professional in his craft, his expertise. He had six hours to do this job—six hours to do what he gradually realized, as the hours went by, was close to impossible. He needed more time.... If he had just had a little more time....!

A right at the next corner, left to the end of the hall, and there it was. Along with his accomplice, Firman. "Six hours," said Firman in a low voice, then hurried down the hall.

Jake noted by his watch that it was precisely eight o'clock. He put a confident hand on the knob of the door. It was locked; Jake swore under his breath.

Like most accomplices he'd known, Firman couldn't be depended on; he was supposed to have left that door open. He was already out of sight, back no doubt to his office where he held a position of some importance; and from which, Jake grimly hoped, he would at least manage to guard the door for the next six fateful hours.

Now by habit soundlessly, he whipped out keys. The door proved old, warped; it took a full minute to give. Six hours minus sixty seconds. Jake spared an extra second to snort at Firman and with him, all accomplices. One of the world's top safe-crackers for most of his sixty-two years Jake had been sent up just twice, had done four and then seven and each time it was the fault of a lousy "helper". At least this time there would be no need for an accomplice in the getaway—Jake planned simply to walk out in the two o'clock shift with the money.

And there was its source. Looming beyond the few nondescript desks and file cabinets; about four feet in height, three in depth, five wide; a crouching, challenging slab of steel. A modern monster created to protect the things men valued most. Jake gave it a long, speculative look. Probably full of gimmicks invented while he was doing that last stretch. But—six hours minus two minutes? He could crack any safe in that time.

Now he crouched before his opponent. "Well, well," he whispered, "let's see how tough you really are."

The dial on the front stared back. Jake gave it an experimental twirl, starting on the assumption—doubtful—that it might be a simple combination lock with tumblers.

No familiar feel telegraphed itself through his fingers. He hunkered down beside his tool kit and took out a stethoscope; then, like some futuristic doctor feeling for the heartbeat of a robot, he listened while spinning the dial a few more times.

Not a murmur. If it was tumblers, he thought, they

were using foam rubber now. He was feeling tense—nervous, but a little high, too, as if he'd just thrown back a double shot of whisky. Cracking this beauty was going to mean more to him than the money that was in the job.

Now. Time lock? He was on hands and knees, peering for wires. Firman had done one thing right; he'd managed to move the safe out a couple of feet from the back-wall, so that no side was impossible to get at. No evidence of an alarm system on the front and two sides. The back area was shrouded in shadow; his palms swept the dusty floor and found a wire; he scowled. If the monster was wired into the general factory alarm or the police nothing could be done without triggering the mechanism.

Hold on now. He was out of practice or he would've realized it at once. That wire was too thin to be part of an alarm system. It must be for a light inside the safe. He almost laughed out loud. Like a refrigerator—so the millionaires with the combination wouldn't miss one little plum, like a stack of hundreds, when they reached their fat hands away inside.

His own hands reached for the wire cutter. *Snap.* A little action, even if it didn't open any doors. Now. He just hoped the monster wouldn't turn out to have a combination tumbler *and* time lock. In that case he could spend the next—what'd he still have, five hours?—on figuring out the combination and it still wouldn't do any good. This baby could be timed to open at nine a.m., or nine p.m. the next day. . .

He glanced at his watch, felt a sting of surprise and irritation. Half an hour spent already. And nothing to show.

B-r-r-r-r. The staccato bite of the drill was loud in the little room, but Jake wasn't worried about the noise. Outside, heavy machinery clanked and pounded, the sounds of a factory in full operation. What was worrying him was that in drilling out the dial he was probably wasting precious time. In modern safes the position of the dial might indicate the presence of the lock behind it. Or it might be a blind. The door could be anywhere else.

He paused to wipe sweat from his eyes, then went on. *B-r-r-r-r.*

Four hours to go. He had drilled four neat holes near

the dial. Next, hammer and chisel. The blows sounded like thunderclaps but he paid no attention. He was fighting a slow mounting fury at the monster. Up to now, a perfect record. Up to now —At the fifth blow the dial came off and clanged to the floor.

A smooth surface mocked. Now, cold comfort, he knew the dial was a dummy.

Three hours, about. He didn't take time to look at his watch. Now he was drilling again, on another part of the face. Suddenly the drill broke through. Jake felt the message through his aching arms. Empty space—a sandwich wall.

He bent forward, sniffing with caution. The air was stale, but at least there was no whiff of poison gas waiting for him in that deceitful layer of steel-copper-steel. He recovered the drill and stood up for a moment, muscles trembling, breath coming in pants. Tired already, and nowhere. Not as young as he used to be. But then back to the job. He was Jake, the best safe-cracker around; and no monster had beaten him yet.

Less than three hours to go. *Br-oooo-mmmm!* The explosion existed only in his head, as he thought with brief longing of the clean immediate results of a dynamite charge. But blasting had been vetoed by Firman because the explosives and caps would have had to be stolen, and there wasn't the time for that on this job; besides there was also the ignition switch and wiring and you had to have a convenient source or current; and all the stuff had to be brought in past the guards; a regular tool kit was the limit. Jake was just as relieved, come to think of it, that he wasn't going to blast. He had tried dynamite once back in the forties and it was the fifties before he'd got over it. A masterpiece of a job, but the wall between himself and the safe hadn't been as thick as his—*accomplice*— had reported when casing the joint. At the prison hospital the boys with sharp knives had spent a leisurely three years picking his carcass free of bits of concrete and wood and paper pellets, unrecognizable, unspendable shreds of government green.

The drill probed, chattered . . .and "Jeezus!" he cried, as it stuck, jerked against his hand and broke off. That

damn' soft copper of the sandwich!

One hour, or less? He saw the monster now through drops of sweat, a haze of red. He had been over what seemed to be every square inch, looking for a concealed key hole. He had felt for cracks with a plastic strip. Somewhere there must be a crack, in which the strip could edge itself, to move a bolt...

Through the haze of his exhaustion, anger and rising alarm he could almost see the longed-for sight of a torch. An acetylene torch, its red sparks flying as it cut into steel like butter. Yeah. A torch was fine on an old safe, but on a sleek steel monster like this he had known better than to try. He couldn't have carried enough oxygen into the factory to do the job.

Fifty minutes left. Forty. Thirty-five. Even the best-concealed door must have hinges. With a new bit in the drill he felt cautiously along the edges. There? Nothing. Around to the back. Nothing. Nothing.

Eighteen minutes, only by then Jake wasn't counting. He had abandoned all thought of time in his rage at the obdurate monster. Desperately he was now using a hacksaw to work away at one corner. If he could get a glimpse at the safe's construction...

Zzzzeeee — hawwww, zzzzeeee-hawwww. At this rate it was going to take years.

He thought, suddenly, clearly and cleanly under the noise, of the answer. Of a part of the safe he had up to then, unaccountably, missed. He started to shift position, to make a triumphant attack, when the door of the room burst open.

Jake got slowly to his feet, hands hanging, clenched at his side.

"Mr. Firman," he began, "if you'll give me one more minute. I just remembered. The top of the safe."

The man in the doorway laughed. "Right, Jake, but the six hours are up. Well, I guess we can now deliver the safe to our jeweler customers without undue worry, eh? If the best old pro in the business failed..."

"Just one minute more," Jake mumbled. "The first time in my life, Mr. Firman..."

"Sorry, Jake, but that was our agreement. Any burglar trying to get at that safe would have the hours between midnight and six a.m.,

and have to get past the police on the block, carrying nothing more bulky than an ordinary lunchbox. Now," Firman held out a check, "here's your five hundred. Not a bad heist for six hours work. And there'll be another job in about a month. Why Jake," Firman's laughter followed him down the hall, "enough incentive to keep you going straight from now on, eh?"

Jake shuffled out with a bunch of other workers, past the factory clock that clicked at them: Two-oh-five. Suddenly his tired old face perked up. If Firman had left that door unlocked like he'd said, there would've been one more minute. And in that minute he could've found the keyhole in the top of the safe. Pocketing the check, he went out into the sunlight, smiling.

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them guys

by A. N. Glennon

The trouble with driving your own car, Tom Flynn told himself, is that you've got to remember to put gas in, once in a while.

He looked again at the gauge. The needle was riding the big black E, perilously close to the peg that indicated a tank full of nothing but leftover vapors. He sighed. This could never happen in his Shore Patrol sedan; one of his men had that serviced each day.

There were already two other cars at the all-night station on Big Pine Key a big crowd for 2 A.M. Tom, concentrating on getting his car alongside a pump before his engine quit, didn't notice at first that the other cars were Sheriff's Department cruisers. on business.

He waited in the car for a minute, listening to the chirps and grunts of a Florida Keys night. The air began to close in on him, now that his car had stopped. Since no one seemed inter-

Commander Tom Flynn, Senior Shore Patrol Officer for Key West, returns in this story about a night on the Florida Keys, and the men who insisted the sailors had robbed him. Yes. He was sure they'd been sailors. "They had those little bird-looking things on their arms." It looked like trouble. . .

ested in pumping gas, Tom got out of his car and approached the group standing in front of the office. Sergeant Evarts, one of the deputies, recognized Tom, from the time they'd worked on a case together.

"Hi, Commander; you sure didn't waste any time getting here."

"What do you mean, waste any time? I left Miami before midnight. I may have made good time, but I didn't break any speed laws."

Evarts scowled for the space of a couple of blinks, then grinned as he understood.

"Sorry. Thought you'd been called in on this, and came up from Key West. We've only been here a few minutes, ourselves, and I didn't expect to see you so soon. Well, long as you're here, you may as well start working. A couple of sailors are in trouble here, so you Shore Patrol people will probably get involved anyhow."

Tom looked more closely at the group. "What sailors? I don't see anyone here but you deputies and the station attendant, there."

Evarts nodded. "Right, Flynn. Mc Gee, here, runs the station all alone from midnight to eight in the morning. Says two sailors pulled in here an hour or so ago, and while he was pumping gas, they jumped him and knocked him out. When he came to, all the money in the place was gone. We looked the place over, and it's sure gone. They didn't miss a penny."

McGee, tall and skinny, stood listening to the two. He looked pale and shaken, but he added his word to confirm what Evarts had said. "Yeah, that's right," he said. "Took every cent in the place. Even cleaned out my pockets." He pulled his pockets inside out, as if to prove what he said, then resumed wiping grease from his face and hands while they talked. He winced when he rubbed the greasy rag behind his right ear. The rag came away with blood on it.

"Looks like you got a pretty good rap," Tom said.

"Yeah, I was out for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. When I came to, I had this big goose egg, and I guess it was a couple more minutes before I remembered to call the Sheriff's Office." He put his hand to his head and groaned. "Boy, what a hangover."

One of the deputies got a first aid kit from the cruiser, and began cleaning the wound. "Nasty cut here," he

said. "What'd they hit you with?"

"Dunno," Mc Gee said. "If I'd been looking, I wouldn't have let them hit me. All I know's I was pumping gas, and they were wandering around, getting drinks from the cooler, and then I was laying on the ground, here, all alone."

"You're sure they were sailors?" As Senior Shore Patrol Officer for Key West, Tom hated to hear of sailors in trouble. After all, his job was keeping them out of trouble.

"Yeah. They were in uniform; had those little bird-looking things on their arms."

"What kind of car?"

"Blue, convertible, about three years old. They had a base sticker in the windshield."

"How did you get all that grease on you?" Tom asked.

Mc Gee jabbed his thumb at the grease rack. "I was working on my own car between customers."

The car was still on the hydraulic lift, about five feet in the air. Oil and grease splattered and smeared on the concrete beneath the car testified that Mc Gee had been a little careless in his work.

Tom turned to Sergeant Evarts. "What have you done so far?"

"Well, Mc Gee thought they were headed toward Key West when they came in, but we don't know for sure. We used the radio to set up road blocks at Key Largo, and Stock Island, while we were on our way out here. That way, we've got them at either end of the Overseas Highway, if they haven't already gotten through. They had less than an hour's head start, but it's close."

"If they did get past, the base sticker will help," Tom said. "There aren't so many blue convertibles that we can't narrow the field down pretty fast, just by going through the application records for base stickers. If we can find a few sailors with the right kind of car, that can't account for tonight, maybe Mc Gee could pick one of them from the group."

"How soon can you get started on that?" Evarts asked.

"I'll call in now, and have the Patrol start checking the vehicle pass records," Tom said. "Where's the phone?"

"In the office."

Tom dropped in a dime, dialed the Naval Base number, and asked for the Shore Patrol extension. The night

man, Brannigan, answered.

"Brannigan, this is Mister Flynn."

"Yes, sir, Commander. How come you're calling in at this time of night? You in trouble, or something?"

"Not me, Brannigan. Looks like a couple of our boys in blue might be, though." Tom gave him the details of what to look for, and Brannigan promised a first listing ready for the Patrol's day shift.

Evarts was still talking to Mc Gee when Tom rejoined them. The other deputies were fanned out over the station, one dusting the soft drink machine for fingerprints, another trying to decipher tire marks on the apron, and the third shining a flashlight around in the brush surrounding the station.

"What's he doing?" Tom asked, pointing at the third man.

"Looking for whatever they clouted Mc Gee with," Evarts said. "Something not too heavy, but with a sharp corner, judging from the wound. We figured they may have thrown it away after they hit him."

They stood there in the humid night, sweating a little in spite of a slight breeze coming in off the Florida Straits. The breeze wasn't especially cool, but it did carry a slight odor of rotting sea life from the beaches, to cut the sharp smell of gas that hung over the station. Tom looked around, until a sudden thought brought him to attention. "Did you come up all the way from Key West?" he asked Evarts. Evarts nodded. "Pass anyone headed the other way?"

Evarts shook his head. "No, and that's sort of funny, now you ask. They wouldn't have had time to get in to Key West before we cleared Stock Island. They must have gone the other way."

It was Tom's turn to shake his head. "Nope. I didn't pass anyone, either, the last hour or so. Traffic was light for the tail end of the weekend."

"Maybe they ducked into one of the housing developments, up this way from Key West."

"Maybe, but that doesn't sound like two sailors on liberty. Besides, those roads only go a short way off the highway." Tom thought for a minute, then looked at Evarts. "They could have gone to the Naval Air Station, though. Boca Chica's enough this side of Key West, they might have gone through the gate before you passed. Suppose I stick with you until you're through, here. I can

have the Patrol take care of the screening of the cars on the base, and we can check Boca Chica together on our way back to Key West."

"Glad to have you. That'd be a big help to us."

"I'll call back and leave word for Chief Evans to take charge. He's going to do most of the work, anyway." Tom went toward the phone again, but stopped before he reached it. He stood still for a few seconds, thinking, then turned toward Sergeant Evarts. About to speak, he changed his mind. Instead, he turned aside, and went into the grease bay. He picked up a drop light, plugged it in, and ducked his big frame under the lift. After a brief inspection, he returned to Sergeant Evarts.

"Guess I won't call it just yet, Sergeant."

"Why not?"

"I think it might be a good idea to check Mc Gee's car over. Mind?"

"Nope, but why?"

"Well, the money's not in the station, because you checked. If it was out in the brush, your man with the flashlight probably would have found it. The car's a good, convenient place for it, and I'll bet you didn't look there, did you?"

Evarts' eyes opened wider, and his jaw dropped momentarily, until he regained control. "You think Mc Gee set himself up?"

"I'm sure of it. Let's look in the car."

Tom operated the lever to lower the car on the lift. Mc Gee turned paler, watching.

"Hey, now. What you two doing?" he asked.

"Want to look at your car, Mc Gee," Evarts said.

"Why aren't you out looking for them guys that stole the money?"

Evarts glared at him, daring him to protest further. "That's just what we're doing, Mc Gee."

Mc Gee subsided, mumbling something about cops never tending to their business.

Tom looked into the car, then opened the door and checked the glove compartment and under the seats. "Must be in the trunk," he said. He tried the handle of the trunk, but the lid wouldn't open.

Evarts beckoned to Mc Gee. "Come here and open this," he said.

Mc Gee, not at all eager, unlocked the trunk. Prodded by Evarts, he lifted the lid. Evarts looked into the trunk, then at Mc Gee. "How much did you say was taken?"

Mc Gee tried to run, but

the deputies grabbed him. Evarts, slowly shaking his head, looked at Tom. "How'd you figure that out, Flynn?"

"Well, the car was logical. With the money already in it, he could just get in and drive off, with no suspicious moves."

"Okay, okay, but how'd you figure this out?"

"Well, the grease rack wasn't up to its full height. He probably wanted part of it near eye level, but he'd have had to be crouched down while he was moving around underneath his car. If you look, you'll find a sharp angle with some blood and hair on it, on the underside of the lift. That's what knocked him out, and he fell into all that grease and oil. He probably bent down to pick up a tool, and forgot how low he had the rack set when he stood back up. When he woke up, he saw he had a good hold-up angle readymade."

"Sure, Flynn, I see that; but what wised you up to him?"

"When I started back to call the Patrol Office the second time, I remembered those sailors he dreamed up had cleaned out every cent in the station, including what he had in his pockets."

"Isn't that what they would have done, if there'd been any sailors?"

"Of course. So, where'd he get the dime for his phone call to you?"

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ALL BRAND NEW ADVENTURES OF *THE SAINT*

what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

Eva-Lis Wuorio's excellent MIDSUMMER LOKKI (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95) is close to being a lovesong to Karelia, a part of Finland until 1944.

The province had been inhabited by Karelian tribes since before 3,000 B.C. By 300 A.D., it was one of the most highly civilized corners of the North, trading with Constantinople—furs, salt, salmon, in return for the riches of the East. The Karelians were writing free verse and painting pictures when the Vikings were the scourge of Europe. And a thousand years later, most of the music of Finland, almost all of her songs and much of her arts, came from Karelia. As Lennart Ounamo puts it, the Karelians "cry, laugh, shout. They love and they suffer, aloud and in song. They stamp their feet and tear their hair and throw their arms around you."

And they have the kind of courage, maverick courage

The writer, whose s-f anthology, CODS FOR TOMORROW, has just been published by Award Books (who also published his AWARD ESPIONAGE READERS), has been Editor of this magazine since 1956. He was formerly, 1945-52, editor of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, and was awarded the 1963 Critic's Edgar by Mystery Writers of America.

if you wish, that ignores obstacles. . . .

When 500,000 of them were evacuated from their homes in 1944 as the Russians, with our blessings, took over the province, they chose to leave because they could not conceive of once more living under Russian rule. Anything—even poverty in free Finland—was preferable! (Many people in this country fail to understand how well, and how long, most Finns and most Swedes *have* known Russia. . .) The Karelians settled down wherever places could be found for them but, each summer, including this particular summer when Canadian newspaperman Luke Ramsey at long last is reunited with his family, thousands of people meet to sing of their past and about the Karelia that was. . . . MIDSUMMER LOKKI deals with an attempt, by the ungodly, to create an "incident" at this annual festival which can mean danger for Ramsey's relatives and possibly even endanger Finland's independence.

Karelia elää—Karelia lives —is the password, and Luke Ramsey, whose mother had sung Finnish songs to him when he was small, discovers that this is still true. Very true. . . He had forgotten that Finland was after all part of his heritage, part of his blood, just as so many of us tend to turn our backs on the past. His discovery of Finland, in this, Eva-Lis Wuorio's best novel to date, is to bring him excitement —and pain. And peace. . . . Do read MIDSUMMER LOKKI!

Apropos of Communism, an old friend of this magazine has suggested that some of you might be interested in what I wrote in the December 1961 issue of *The Journal of the Interplanetary Exploration Society*. . .

"These days, however, we are faced by a far different problem. It is not only a question of conflict between two schools of thought—it is a conflict between two ways of life—between the shadows and the sunlight. Nobody denies that much remains to be done before we may, objectively, consider ourselves to be more than a grouping of peoples with a common language and kindred traditions. This should not blind us, however, to the moral sickness (if I may use an old fashioned term) of those who live in and rule the shadows. Objective intellectual admiration for

the achievements in science of those with whom we differ, should not blind us to the cost of these achievements in terms of blood and in terms of denial of those rights which we hold dear. We cannot shut our eyes and pretend that these achievements do not exist—these times do not allow us the luxury of ostrichism—but we cannot at the same time ignore the reality that from Kapitsa to Gagarin these achievements have come about because in their society the individual is nothing—the state, the demands of the state if you wish, is everything.... It is this which fascinates some for whom what both we and they so erroneously call the communist way of life has a certain attractiveness—not doctrinally but because there is to be seen the ultimate refinement of the concept of the state first elaborated upon (in our culture) by Machiavelli, and then by Caesare Borgia, and then by Mussolini, and then by Goebbels. Again and again, in Caesare's world—and later in Kapitsa's—we find the individual, his dreams and his ambitions, reduced to unimportance if these should differ from the state's concept of what these should be. I believe we are agreed that this is not the road for us."

As a matter of fact, in 1937, long before Orwell, I felt this way.

I still do not look forward to 1984.....

Richard Starnes' REQUIEM IN UTOPIA (Trident Press, $4.95), while unquestionably his best novel to date, is at the same time more than disturbing in its description of the degree of autonomy, to put it mildly, under which the C.I.A. appears to operate abroad. Colonel Alabaster, Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy, Stockholm — and station chief of the Central Intelligence Agency—has, to quote the author, "a meaty, corrugated face, ginger-colored eyes, heavy orange-to-brindled eyebrows, and crinkled hair of the same color that clung close to his skull." While the Ambassador is titular Chief of Mission, it is Colonel Alabaster who runs things—and this alone is disturbing if you keep in mind that the Colonel is almost a stereotype of those singularly dedicated and humorless men who, not so long ago, divided the world into the Saved and the Sinners, distrusting Intellectuals, men of independent thought, and

professors who could not be bullied, with the single-mindedness of latterday Cotton Mathers.

A man such as this obviously cannot understand Maxwell Speed, veteran prize-winning journalist, who has a friend in Stockholm who is the arch-type of everything that Colonel Alabaster not only does not understand, but abhors. Men such as this, and for that matter Maxwell Speed also, find it hard to understand the Swedes, infinitely more complex and politically sophisticated than the familiar generalizations about them suggest.... Mr. Starnes, a distinguished Scripps-Howard journalist, has written an important novel about these times, marred only, as far as I am concerned, by an almost predictable concession to Sales. Our illusions about sexual freedom in Sweden must apparently not be destroyed....

By way of contrast, there is Michael Gilbert's group of stories, GAME WITHOUT RULES (Harper & Row, $4.95), most of them originally published in EQMM, which pose the possibility of gentlemanly spy-catchers surviving into these somewhat less than gentlemanly days. I particularly liked, "Upon the King...", describing an attempt to delay the return to his Middle East homeland of the young man who had, all a'sudden, become King. The attempt fails and, days later, the British agent is thinking.... "The boy had shown himself brave and resourceful. He knew what he wanted to do and would, if given time, learn how to do it. If he could escape the sudden bullet, and the planted bomb. If he could answer propaganda with deeds. He had captured their hearts. Now he would have to capture their minds as well." (pp.174-175)

Dick Francis continues, in his latest novel, FLYING, FINISH (Harper & Row, $4.95), to tell an exciting and credible story, set against the background familiar to the author, the world of horses—the men who deal in them, the men who breed them, and the men who ride them and who often have more respect and affection for the horses they work with than they have for their employers... This is a very special world, alien to most, certainly alien to those for whom racing has other meanings. Henry Grey, son of the Earl of Creggan, is a thoroughly believable actor

against this background, flier, amateur rider and traveling head groom, unconsciously headed for violence and possible death. Do read this!

J. J. Marric—John Creasey, past president of the Mystery Writers of America, to all of us—returns with GIDEON'S WRATH (Harper & Row, $4.50), his twelfth novel about Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard, and possibly the most interesting novel to date, at least as far as I am concerned, because it deals in part with the potential for damage and destruction of the zealot, the fanatic if you wish, a potential far older than the latter-day 'isms which tend to obscure this long-time law enforcement reality. I hasten to add that by "zealot" I do not mean the so-called Nihilist or Anarchist who in the past, either on his or her own initiative or as the appointed representative of their organization, comitted an act or acts against the Establishment of the day. By "zealot" I mean the man or woman who, as an act of faith, in obedience to his or her understanding of the Will of God, can destroy and demolish the world around them —and us—in the name of a wrongly understood God.

GIDEON'S WRATH is, like the earlier Gideon novels, a superb police procedure novel, giving us once more an idea of the responsibilities of the law enforcement officers in megalopolis. But what I found particularly interesting was this problem which Gideon has to face—the destructive power of hate, in a society and in a world which, in the main, does not want to know or to acknowledge the potential of this hate. It is not that we do not learn from the past; it is simply that we do not like to remember....

The publishers tell us, with considerable justification, that Wilson Tucker's THE WARLOCK (Doubleday, $3.95) is "a most unusual espionage novel", and this it is. You may or may not believe that American Military Intelligence, at a special level, is this advanced. Be this as it may, read and enjoy—and wonder—about THE WARLOCK.

Anthony Maitland, barrister—and catalyst for violence—returns in Sara Woods' latest novel, LET'S CHOOSE EXECUTORS (Harper & Row, $4.95). He is as pleasant, as thoroughly civilized, and as obstinate, as he has

been in the earlier novels. Do read this.

Amanda Cross' THE JAMES JOYCE MURDERS (Macmillan, $3.95), again about Professor Kate Fansler, amateur sleuth, has its amusing moments as murder complicates the researches of Kate and her friends and seems to confirm the doubts of their neighbors in the Berkshires about the goings-on among these academics.

Nicholas Freeling's latest and award winning novel about Inspector Van der Valk, THE KING OF THE RAINY COUNTRY (Harper & Row, $4.50), while perhaps not as effective as his earlier novels about the interesting Inspector Van der Valk, is still a first-rate suspense and chase novel which you should read if you've not already done so.

Chief Officer Webb Carrick returns in Bill Knox' new novel, BLACKLIGHT (Doubleday, $3.95), which again deals with the problems, the law enforcement problems, of the Fishery Protection Service. H.M. fishery cruiser *Marlin's* assignment is to make sure the participants in a champion angler contest do not wander off into forbidden waters.

"Quite a number of Americans in high places beyond their own borders are these days tending to take on the airs and graces of Britannia's old proconsuls. They are obliged to run sizable areas of the world, and it's a total headache, and the least you can get out of it is a little personal dignity. The British haven't a scrap of dignity left and are having fun for the first time in at least a century, going about like imminent bankrupts who have got everything tucked away in their wives' names, which leaves them astonishingly light on responsibility. And positively gay." (p. 9)

Gavin Black's latest Paul Harris novel, A WIND OF DEATH (Harper & Row, $4.95), deals in part with these attitudes of mind of Mr. Clement P. Winburgh, of the C.I.A., coldly objective in the best proconsul tradition, knowing just enough of Malaysia—but not quite enough—to bull his way through a situation with the reluctant assistance of Paul Harris, once English, now Malaysian, and suspect for a variety of proconsulish reasons. An excellent adventure novel. Don't miss it!

taps for tommy

by Monica Witni

"There'll be just a routine security check. There've been too many leaks from Thule in the last few years. Shouldn't worry you, though." Whizzer Morris looked up at me like a tired vulture through the smoke-screen generated by his fresh panatella, then turned back to the sheaf of contracts on his desk, scribbled his name hastily on all four copies, and handed them back to me.

"Wish we had more rehearsal time," I looked the contracts over carefully before I signed. "The girls play O.K., but we sound kinda ragged together."

Not that I didn't trust Whizzer. We'd been friends, personal as well as professional, for a lot of years, but he was still an agent. He expected you to be business-like.

"So, who's gonna know? Anything'll sound good to them guys so long as it smiles pretty and wears a

Larry, "the Personality Kid, the Man of 1001 Tunes", was pushing forty, balding, putting on weight—and needed to pay the rent. Which was why he let himself be talked into this strange engagement up at Thule Air Force Base where "Taps for Tommy" almost became "Taps for Larry".....

skirt. After all, 7000 or so guys, and maybe fifteen women around."

"And where does that leave me?" I asked as I signed. It was a good deal. Maybe I could make a down-payment on that little bar when I got back.

"You're still Larry Warren, the Personality Kid, the Man of 1001 Tunes. You'll make out. Don't feel bad. It's you they'll listen to," Whizzer pointed to a bold sprawling signature at the bottom of the contract, "That's the big wheel, manager of the Officers' Club, Captain William Schertz, all brass and a yard wide. He'll probably be going back on the plane with you."

I shook hands with Whizzer and pocketed my copy of the contract. As I hurried to leave the tiny smoky office before I choked to death, Whizzer added:

"Just one thing, Larry, Schertz doesn't know about Pat Lester being killed in that auto accident. He still thinks he's getting an all girl quintet."

Good old Whizzer, agent to the core, I thought as the elevator dropped efficiently from the thirty-fifth floor to discharge its cargo noisily at street level. But I guess I should be thankful I'd been selected to fill in. I was getting leader's money at a time when it was more than welcome.

What with television, tight money, a couple of bad investments, and the flood of kid rock bands that worked way under union scale, sometimes "for the experience" it wasn't easy for a guy who'd played good solid piano all his life to find work anymore. Especially when that guy was pushing forty, balding, putting on weight, also expecting enough money to pay the rent on his furnished room and allow at least one nutritious meal a day.

So two days later I was packed, had had my shots, and was waiting for Sherry to pick me up. She was driving us all to Fort Dix in her station wagon, that would also be loaded with luggage and instruments. I knew where I'd sit—right in the middle in the front seat. Oh well, it was cheaper than taking the bus and staying overnight at a nearby motel. Sherry planned to leave the car there with a friend and take us all back to New York when we returned.

The jet left for Goose Bay at 11 A.M., and she said she'd be by at seven on the dot. That's why I was startled by a knock on the door

at six fifteen. It couldn't be Sherry, ahead of time. She'd stay double parked and lie on the horn until I showed.

"Mr. Laurence Warren?" a tidy brown-suited young man inquired crisply as he showed me a badge and written credentials to match.

"Yes," I mumbled and stepped back as he removed his hat and entered, closing the door quickly behind him.

"Just a routine check, you understand," he was deadpan and all business as he asked me questions, some personal, others seemingly irrelevant.

It was all over in less than five minutes. As he left he did an odd thing, shoved a sealed envelope into my hand and quickly put a finger to his lips.

"Thank you, Mr. Warren, that will be all. Have a good trip," he almost smiled, then turned, looked me full in the face, and whispered, "Be very careful."

Was he kidding? That was my first reaction. My second was to slam and lock the door and pull down the blind over my one window like the hero in a third rate TV thriller. The only lamp beside the only easy chair was still lit and I hurriedly tore open the long, blank, white envelope.

YOU WILL DESTROY THIS AS SOON AS YOU HAVE COMPLETELY MEMORIZED IT, was the salutation in large letters. I kept reading.

"In all ways you will act normally while at Thule. One night someone will request the song, "Taps for Tommy" and give you a dollar tip. You will immediately put the dollar into a blank white envelope along with the name of the person making the request, seal the envelope, and drop it into the mailbox at the Thule Officers' Club with no stamp and no address. And do it at once. It may seem like a foolish thing, but it is vital to your country's security that you follow these simple directions to the letter. You have our promise there is no hazard in this as long as you say nothing. Your anonymity is your security."

Impatiently I crumpled the letter and threw it in the wastebasket, trying to laugh the whole thing off as someone's idea of a corny joke. Whizzer might have done something like that once but he wasn't drinking that much any more on account of his ulcer. Sure was a sneaky way to snatch a buck. I laughed aloud, then picked the letter out of the waste basket.

The laugh died in my

throat. There wasn't a trace of writing on that sheet of paper. When I put a match to it and its envelope they vanished in a puff of weird green smoke, leaving only a thimbleful of ashes to flush down the drain.

"Why so quiet, Sweety?" Sherry Moreno asked as her station wagon rolled down the Turnpike toward Fort Dix.

"Who could be noisy at this inhuman hour? I'm usually getting my best sleep about now," I grumbled from my place between Sherry and Judy in the front seat.

"So, go to sleep," she said.

"How?"

"You can use my shoulder," Sherry offered cheerfully.

In the back Nancy and Roberta were fast asleep against each other, which wasn't unusual. They were inseparable. Little Judy was dozing next to me, and her head began resting lightly on my shoulder. I hadn't the heart to disturb her, so I sat up and watched the road with Sherry.

Why couldn't this have happened about fifteen years ago when I wouldn't have felt or looked so fatherly? I glanced at the angelic face of Judy Rubin so close to mine, and sighed deeply. With her short, brown, naturally curly hair, enormous blue eyes, and pink and cream complexion she looked like a perpetual fugitive from some Senior Prom instead of a feminine but quite competent bass violin player.

Then there was Nancy Warwick with her constant smile, classic features, and long blond hair. If you looked at her face long enough you forgot about the withdrawn expression in her hazel eyes and the emaciated look of her thin body. She played a wonderfully sweet trumpet, but seemed like a shadow next to robust Roberta Sparks.

Bob Sparks, big, rawboned, made all the decisions involving the two of them. I wondered if Nancy was able to brush her teeth without first asking Roberta's permission. Under protest, Bob wore the cocktail dresses that served to proclaim her a woman, and a minimum of makeup. Her close-cropped black hair was always plastered wetly to her head making her look as though she had just come out of the shower. But she played a passable saxophone.

And then there was attractive red-headed Sherry, all show business. Her words

and gestures were always decisive and a bit over-emphatic. With her striking and flashy way of dress and makeup she would always stand out in any group. She'd had a couple of small parts in some Broadway shows and never let you forget it. But she sure could belt out a song. She also played the cocktail drums when time came to rest her voice.

My mind went back to the tidy young man and the letter he had given me. I wondered whoever had resurrected "Taps For Tommy" as a signal. It was an undistinguished old World War I tearjerker that should have been decently buried long ago. I'll bet if the girls knew about the cloak and dagger bit, they'd laugh like hell. All but Judy. She'd sympathize.

"You get your security interview?" Sherry made conversation.

"Yeah, just routine, he said."

"Same with us. A white-haired old guy that acted like somebody's grandfather. He questioned all of us. You get him too?"

"Yeah, I got the same one," I hadn't the faintest idea why I lied. Maybe I thought I was being careful.

The jet was only an hour late leaving, which was pretty good for the army. As it was we just made it, got checked in and settled for the five hour trip. In the old days it was a good twelve hours to the Thule Air Force Base in Greenland from Fort Dix, not counting a stop-over at Goose Bay. If the weather was even a little bad it meant overnight there, which could be a chilling experience even if you were lucky enough to find a room somewhere.

The interior of the jet was like a long, tapered, horizontal silo. All seats faced the rear, and there were no windows at all, only a string of small low-watt bulbs to illuminate the cavernous interior. Above the seats and anchored in racks to the roof on the plane were the Mae Wests, all that could save our lives if we happened to ditch in Arctic waters. We were given a short and informative lecture on how to use them, then told to fasten our seat belts. The sudden roar of the engines exploded in my ears like a sound bomb.

Only then was I aware of the compact Brass sitting stiffly in the seat next to mine. As I looked at him, he frowned, gestured imperiously toward my seat belt, then looked straight ahead. Across

from me Sherry, sitting next to Judy on the aisle, already had her eye on the natty little officer. I wondered how he had ever passed the height requirements. Somewhere in the back of the aircraft Bob was carrying on an animated conversation with some enlisted men who, I knew, were vainly trying to impress Nancy. You could hear them even above the shrieking jets.

Somewhere in front of me a group of long-haired rock and roll kids were chattering excitedly as the plane began to move into its take-off pattern. They were another group going, and their girl singer, a gum masticating blond in a mini skirt with a loud and uninhibited voice, was sure to be the darling of the men. Was I ever that young, I wondered?

"I'm Captain Schertz," a brusquely efficient voice said in my ear. "How do you do?"

"Hello, I'm Larry Warren. You manage the Officers' Club, don't you?"

"I do, and what happened? I understand you're the leader of the quintet. The contract I signed was for five girls, *not* four girls and a man."

"It couldn't be helped. One of the girls was killed in an auto accident a couple weeks ago."

"Mr. Morris should have mentioned it. I signed those contracts in good faith," Captain Schertz snapped.

"Well, I could wear a dress and a wig if it'd help," I remarked.

"Absolutely not. The idea itself is disgusting."

"Sorry I mentioned it."

The Captain obviously had no sense of humor. I wondered how he'd take it if I told the story about the three-legged General. Probably order the plane to turn around in mid-air and take us all back.

I slept most of the way, even through the twenty minute stop-over in Goose Bay. I was dimly aware that Sherry was doing all right with Schertz.

After we landed at Thule and went through the interminable process of checking in there was a special air police taxi waiting for us, courtesy of the Captain.

"Just the ladies. This goes to the women's barracks," the uniformed driver shut the door in my face. "You go with the others in the bus to 608."

Judy waved a wistful goodbye, Sherry flashed a superior grin, and Nancy yawned.

Roberta leaned out the window and shouted:

"It pays to be a dame once in awhile, old Buddy."

"Rehearsal at the Officers' Club in an hour," I yelled back peevishly.

"Can't, the reception's there—for all of us," Roberta bellowed, her heavy voice echoing into the dry chill of the Arctic summer afternoon.

Confounded social life was going to be worse than the job. We played only four hours a night: the Officers' Club one night, the Non-Commissioned officers' Club the next, and the Airman's club the next, rotating that way constantly for a month. Well, tomorrow afternoon we'd rehearse for sure.

Thule had been built on the rocky, frozen, uneven floor of a long wide valley. At one side was the low tip of a glacier edging a corner of the airport. On another was the frigid iceberg infested waters of Baffin Bay. The hills and mountains in the distance were similar to the immediate areas, rocky and barren. No trees or bushes grew here, only moss, a few fragile wildflowers, and fields of the graceful white arctic cotton. Being mid-summer the temperature was mild, between forty and sixty degrees. The air was crisp, sunny, and clean, and I breathed deeply for a few moments.

Rehearsal went well the next afternoon. I called it at the Officers' Club, since it was within walking distance for all of us. The bar didn't open until five o'clock so we had the place pretty much to ourselves. Only a few men were sitting back in the lounge reading or writing a letter. Sherry pulled out the piano part of an arrangement, one we had never rehearsed.

"It's easy, and they're all familiar songs except for a couple of these oldies, Civil War and World War I stuff," she pointed to the place. "Let me show you how I do it—a little patter first, then your cue—here."

She gave her little spiel, then we started with her doing the real oldtimers. I was kinda enjoying it until she got to the middle, when I nearly fell off the piano stool. We'd done only a couple bars of "Taps for Tommy" when I stopped cold. I couldn't help it.

"What's the matter, am I going too fast?"

"Yeah, I—lost my place."

When she finished I ran over the whole thing again on my own just to make

sure I could do it without a hitch. The minute she started singing that song I had the creepiest feeling I was being watched.

"Where did you ever come up with that one, 'Taps For Tommy'?"

"My dad used to sing it," she shrugged. "Corny, but it fits my routine perfectly."

"When I play that one I usually get a tip," I joked.

She laughed and made a gesture to show that I was a nut.

"Well, I may not do the arrangement at all unless we get a real drunk night. Do it any time you like, I don't care," and Sherry bounced over to her drum leaving a trail of Shalimar perfume after her.

"Why don't you do it as a duet?" Judy piped up from behind the bass fiddle.

"Why don't we all limber up with some blues?" I turned back to the piano. Then I saw it, crumpled up at the end of the keyboard, which was deeply shadowed.

"Who's the clown?" I unfolded the dollar bill and waved it toward them. "Sherry?"

"Me? With my budget I can't afford to joke around with money," Sherry protested with a brittle laugh.

"I've got to know where this came from, dammit. I want to know which one of you put it here. No one else was near this piano."

Roberta frowned. "Maybe it was already there."

They all swore they'd had nothing to do with it, and I was certain it hadn't been there a few minutes ago. In that case someone was on to me and it had to be one of the girls. I decided to reserve the dollar and not go near the mailbox, which I had seen in the entrance hall. This was probably some kind of a test.

From then on I saw the girls only when we were together playing the job. The rest of the time they were surrounded by uniforms, squired by a different escort every night, but only at first. Judy had found a round-faced young lieutenant fresh from OCS and they had become inseparable. Sherry usually wound up with Captain Schertz, and even Nancy and Roberta had acquired escorts, two sergeants that occupied most of their time. That left me and the rock and roll guys pretty much to ourselves. There was another entertaining unit, a country and western trio, but being girls, they also were swept up in the social whirl.

"Daddy, like this is gettin' to be Dullsville," one of the rock and roll kids put it pretty well.

Our first "extra" performance took place at Camp Tudo, an outlying encampment in the hills. It consisted of a small cluster of quonset huts and an abandoned airstrip accompanied by its deserted hangar. Mainly a weather station, or so we were told, its facilities were cramped and primitive. But the fellows really enjoyed the show, and gave a fine meal for us afterwards at the quonset hut that housed the NCO Club.

I had excused myself to go to the rest room when I heard Judy's voice, so clear it could have been right in the room with me, thin as the walls were.

"But I am interested. I'd love to know all about that heavy equipment outside, and how many men you have here, and if you're working on anything secret. It's so exciting—"

Sweet little Judy was perhaps not so naive and helpless as she appeared. As I left the rest room I saw her and the sergeant she had been talking to as they slowly walked out to the bar. She happened to glance back just then and see me. With a sudden quick smile she left her companion and hurried over.

"Larry, we've all been neglecting you. Come over to the bar. I'll buy," she called brightly, then whispered softly. "This guy is a clam with hands. Thank goodness you're here."

And for the rest of the time she stuck closer to me than glue, giving me all of her big blue-eyed attention. She asked a few questions, innocently enough, it seemed.

She snuggled next to me in the bus on the way back. "That was a riot about Sherry slipping you a dollar after you did that funny old song."

"She swears she didn't."

"But who else would? That's the kind of a sense of humor she's got. Pat Lester used to play that song once in awhile. I still cry thinking of her. We were best friends."

"How did it happen?"

"She fell asleep at the wheel coming home from the job. I was supposed to have gone with her, but left with a date instead."

I felt Judy shiver next to me, and wondered if she could be faking. Looking down at her I saw her brush away a real tear, and imme-

diately hated myself for the unkind thought. I patted her shoulder comfortingly.

The next night was our Officers' Club night. I got there early, had a couple shots of vodka at twenty-five cents each, and decided to play the slot machines. I immediately hit a nickel machine for the jackpot, and felt like it was my lucky night. I collected about six fifty, more than enough for my drinks and dinner. I thought I'd ask Judy to join me for dinner when she came in. Then, looking into the dining room I saw that she was there already, completely absorbed with her lieutenant and having dinner. I sighed. Obviously the lieutenant wasn't all hands. So I ate alone.

Attendance was good that night at the club and they liked our entertainment. We'd been going for almost an hour straight, and I called intermission, when the bartender came up to me.

"Guy down there wants you to play 'Taps For Tommy' and he told me to give you this," he handed me a dollar.

"Who was the guy?"

"Down there at the end of the bar, some civilian."

I squinted through the dimly lit smoke-layered room, seeing but not quite believing it, the tall, round-shouldered, scarecrow-like silhouette puffing on an oversized panatella. It was Whizzer and Captain Schertz, cozy as two conspirators in a plot.

"Want me to sing it, Larry?" Sherry leaned over so close I could feel the softness of her next to me and smell that wild perfume she was wearing.

"No, I'll do it. Go mingle with your Schertz," my own sharpness astonished me as I began to sing the soulful corn of fifty years ago.

The fellows loved it, and kept me up on the stand for awhile longer. The minute I could, however, I ducked into the men's dressing room and whipped out the blank envelope from an inside pocket, scribbled the name of Whizzer Morris on the small slip of paper that was already inside, then put it, the dollar I had just received, and the dollar I had found on the piano inside. I sealed the envelope, replaced it in my pocket, and opened the dressing room door. There was Nancy blocking the way and not moving a muscle.

"Larry, do you think I'm attractive?" she stepped toward me and her face was so near mine I could feel

the warmth of her. It was like she had just stepped out of a highly scented bubble bath. Only there was another scent, a heavy acrid odor about her breath.

"Well, sure, Nancy—"

She tossed the long blond hair back over her shoulders and threw both arms around me under my coat, holding me close in an unexpectedly wiry embrace. She kissed me long and hard on my surprised mouth, moving her hands around my back in a demanding sort of way. I grabbed those searching arms and held them fast as I pushed her back. There was a sarcastic sort of laugh that came from a third figure who had just entered the shadowed hallway.

"No wonder you wanted me to mingle. Why, Nancy, you little character," Sherry seemed highly amused.

Nancy didn't say anything but I could feel the tenseness in the arms I held. She jerked them free, turned, and almost ran away. I felt for the envelope just to make sure it was still there. Then I buttoned my coat.

"I don't mean to intrude on your private life, Sweety, but Bill and Whizzer want you to join us for a drink," she said dryly.

"Be right with you," I said then abruptly turned and left her.

It wasn't easy getting through the crush of satisfied customers and all of them wanting to buy you a drink. But I made it out into the hall where the only person around was the Noncom on duty in the checkroom. He gave me a bored glance then went back to the book he was reading. With a near groan of relief I shoved the envelope through the slot and into the mailbox just as a hearty voice broke the spell.

"Have you seen Nancy? All of a sudden she's just disappeared," Roberta poked her head into the hall suspiciously.

"Yeah, for a moment just after I got off the stand. Why, have you lost her?"

"Well, not exactly, but that kid has a way of getting herself—involved," for a moment Bob's prominent features resembled those of a worried bloodhound.

Maybe she'd like to, I thought, but said nothing as I went back into the club and joined Whizzer, Schertz, and Sherry.

"Thanks for the song," Whizzer shook my hand. "I had to do some more business with Bill. Gives me an

excuse to get away from the office for awhile."

"Always good having you, Morris," Schertz unbent enough to smile.

"I enjoyed that trip to BMEWS today. That sure was some sight, those big radar screens, each one the size of a football field," Whizzer remarked.

"How does he rate when you said no civilian would be allowed to see BMEWS?" Sherry pouted.

"Not after today. Since there was just one of him instead of a party I was able to get permission. And I don't really think you girls would be too interested in the technical intricacies of our Ballistics Missile Early Warning System. It was either that or the glacier trip, and the majority wanted to take the glacier trip," Schertz explained.

He squeezed her hand and bought us all a round of drinks. I was glad the next set would be our last. I can't remember when a few drinks affected me so badly. I was drinking what I always do, vodka and tonic, but they were sure hitting me. Schertz must have given the bartender the word to make them all doubles. Every time I'd try to talk to Sherry he'd say, "have another drink, you're doing a fine job."

When I called time I remember Nancy on one side of me and Sherry on the other, helping me on the stand. Somehow I managed to stay sober enough to finish the night. But then I don't remember too clearly, just that Whizzer helped me on with my things and out the door into the bright sunny midnight air. For once it didn't bother me that the sun should be shining low on the horizon and there was no darkness to speak of, only twilight. What the hell—musicians sleep in the daytime anyway.

I must have passed out cold on my bed with all my clothes on because that's how I woke up. As I struggled out of bed my stomach turned over and my head felt as if it was going to explode. After a hurried trip to the bathroom I removed my wrinkled Tux and the rest of my clothes and rolled back into bed.

I noticed my billfold on the floor and wondered what it was doing there. By stretching out my arm I could just reach it. Thumbing idly through it to find out how much money I'd spent I realized that, though everything was there, it was in the

wrong place. My union card, social security card, and other identification were not where I had originally kept them, nor were the bills in their proper order. Whoever had gone through my wallet had not found what he or she was looking for.

It was the next day before I felt human again, and this was the day we were all to go on the glacier trip, the three musical groups plus some of the military personnell. A special bus picked us up at eight-thirty in the morning. The tug left at nine and would be back at four, giving us time to dress and make our various jobs that night. We were all there with parkas and cameras, the rock and roll kids, the country and western girls, and my group. Even Whizzer went along. And it was a great day for the trip, the temperature hovering close to sixty degrees.

Captain Schertz herded us all aboard and we left right on the dot. I stood in line on deck waiting with the others for the coffee and doughnuts the galley crew was passing out. Sherry and the Captain had theirs already and were squeezing past. She gave me a little nudge.

"Water looks good, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, good enough to swim in."

"Don't try it. You'd last about two minutes in that ice water," Captain Schertz reminded us sternly.

"But I bet you'd last," I muttered under my breath.

Everyone was taking pictures at all angles, both movies and stills, and I was feeling left out of things as usual until Nancy joined me where I was sitting on a box at the stern. Far in the distance on top of a rocky cliff were the huge BMEWS radar screens. She looked at them intently for a moment, then turned to me.

"I'll bet one reason they didn't want us to see it was that they're putting a lot of new equipment in," she turned her wide hazel eyes probingly on me.

"Could be. None of us would know the difference anyway, would we?"

"I hear you walk for miles, that it's a regular little city. Maybe we could do a special show for the men there. Why don't you ask?"

"Because all the men who work there live on the base. Some of the civilians you see in the Officers' Club are BMEWS men."

She laughed. "But there

are others, I'll bet, who never leave the place for months at a time."

"Why are you so interested?"

"No reason," she tossed the long, blond, straight hair over her shoulders, resumed her set smile, and wandered away. I saw why. Bob, camera dangling from her neck, was coming after her.

"Hey, we're passing that big iceberg. Why don't you sit on the rail, like this, so I can get a good shot?" Bob pushed Nancy into position, stepped back, and aimed the camera. "Good girl, good shot."

We were passing through water that was scattered with cakes of ice of varying sizes. There were a number of seals in the distance lazily sunning themselves atop the ice. If the tug would come too close to one of them it would slide effortlessly into the water and dive out of sight.

I was leaning over the stern watching them when I felt a violent pull under my shins and an equally vicious push at the back of my neck. I saw nothing, only had time to catch a familiar scent before I catapaulted into liquid ice. Lucky I howled as I hit that water. It was so cold it literally took away my breath. Even after I came to the surface I was unable to breathe let alone utter a cry for help.

The heavy parka that dragged me under like a stone somehow slipped from me. I hadn't fastened it. Once relieved of that, I managed to move my legs and arms enough to keep afloat. The tug seemed miles away already. Surely someone must have seen me.

I knew I was being frozen alive and no amount of violent movement was going to help me. If the tug didn't come about in the next few seconds—. Something heavy nudged my shoulder, and with a desperate floundering turn I grabbed for it, a huge cake of ice with a high sharp edge. My numb hand was incapable of grabbing so high, but I saw that the ice dropped to water level a few feet farther around, and there were rough ridges that might give me a hand hold.

Fighting for breath I managed to kick my way to the low spot and grabbed wildly for a grip. I thrashed and floundered heavily, fighting the encompassing numbness that was beginning to make any effective movement impossible. The ridges were rough and sharp and, as I found out later, cut my

hands badly, but they saved my life. With just about my last ounce of reserve strength I dragged myself up to safety on that slippery ice cake, and lay there stiff as a human icicle.

"Don't move, Larry, we're coming," from another world I heard the shrill voice of Sherry above the mounting pulse of engines and excited shouting.

Then I remembered nothing until I felt the snug softness of heavy wool around me like a cocoon, coaxing warmth back to my frozen body. Sherry was sitting on the side of the bunk wonderfully close to me with a shot in one hand and a cup of steaming liquid in the other.

"Drink," she ordered, lifting my head up easily.

The shot of brandy went down neat and I felt the heat start in my stomach and begin working up in my throat and into my blood. The hot broth tasted great too, and I gulped it down like it was the last I was going to get. Over her shoulder I saw the anxious faces of Captain Schertz, Nancy, Bob, and Whizzer.

"Bet I lasted longer'n two minutes, Cap.," I rasped hoarsely.

"Almost five," he shook his head dourly.

"Everyone out now. Let him rest and get warm," Sherry ordered, shooing them from the tiny cabin and closing the door. "For Lord's sake, what happened, Larry? How did you happen to fall overboard?"

"I didn't fall, honey, I was pushed," I watched the guarded expression that suddenly made her green eyes seem almost black. "And I know who pushed me."

"Did you see?" the brittle tone had disappeared from her voice.

"I didn't have to. There's only one guy I know smokes a cigar that smells like that. Good old Whizzer."

"Whizzer? Are you certain?" the utter astonishment that registered on her pretty painted face was complete and overwhelming. "But—I gave you the first dollar just to make sure you could follow instructions," she murmured, barely audible above the throbbing of the tug's deisels. "Did he request that song and give you the other dollar?"

I nodded. "You know about that? So what are you, FBI, Secret Service, or what? And why pick on me?"

She smiled mysteriously and put a finger to her lips.

"Because you were completely above suspicion until you were stupid enough to lie about the security interviewer. That started it. Why did you?" she asked severely.

"I—I just don't know. I thought it was the thing to do, that's all."

"Security is no game for amateurs. They always try to pull some cloak and dagger nonsense, or else get nervous. I was against it, using you as a decoy to drop that message."

I paused, then managed to ask weakly, "Message?"

"On the dollar bill. What's the only thing customs never checks? The money you carry, of course. That's how information was getting through, written on a bill with a chemical that would disappear until specially treated."

Sherry stepped to the door and gestured. I was surprised to see Captain Schertz standing guard just outside. Whizzer was close by still puffing his cigar, and in a moment they were standing beside me.

"Larry says you were the one who pushed him over, Whizzer," Sherry's voice sounded strangely grim.

"Larry, boy, you're crazy. You fell. I saw you lose your balance," Whizzer puffed nervously away at the cigar, and would have leaned over me, but the Captain restrained him.

Something about the smoke was making me dizzy. I saw Sherry cough and the Captain sniff then hurry to open several portholes. He jerked the cigar out of Whizzer's mouth.

"What the hell'd you do that for? Them cigars cost money, and I can't get 'em up here."

"But you brought plenty with you, eh?" the little Captain's voice bristled so pugnaciously that the tall gaunt figure of Whizzer Morris seemed to fold up against the door. He put the cigar out and carefully folded it and the ash in an envelope.

"Sure, but—God, I feel funny," Whizzer seemed suddenly about to collapse.

"We all do thanks to that cigar," Sherry snapped. "Who buys them for you?"

"Well—I do," Whizzer turned defensive.

"Little Nancy?" Sherry persisted.

"Sssh, don't tell Bob. She'd kill us," Whizzer's short confession startled us all into momentary silence.

"So it was Nancy? She tried to get the—that item away from me the other

night, when you saw us," I blurted out.

"That's O.K. The Captain knows all about it," Sherry assured me. "Let's get Nancy in here, too."

Schertz went for her and returned with both Nancy and Roberta. Whizzer tried to leave, but the Captain shut the door squeezing all of them into the cabin, which was about the size of a small self-service elevator.

"Whizzer," Nancy's words were low and almost inaudible, "Did you do what I told you?"

She spoke as if oblivious to everyone else and for a terrible moment no one moved. Whizzer's skinny face contorted uncomprehendingly as he stared from me to Nancy.

"God, Larry, maybe I did do it. Funny things have been happening to me lately —blackouts mostly. Am I losing my mind?" Whizzer turned pale and folded onto the bunk beside me despite Schertz' efforts to stop him.

"Mostly since you've been sneaking around meeting Nancy, I'll bet," I said.

He nodded.

"Christ, Whizzer, after all your years of experience with musicians, can't you tell an addict when you see one? Look at Nancy, look at her eyes," I cried.

"Leave the kid alone," Bob suddenly pulled the robot that was Nancy close to her.

"Then who is the Svengali —you?" I leaned forward and looked up into the face of a fanatic.

Roberta Sparks swung herself behind Nancy, using her as a shield. In one large hand she gestured expertly with a deadly looking, medium sized knife.

"We have drugs that manipulate the mind, drugs that make your discoveries in the field primitive," Bob's eyes snapped proudly. "I've been using Nancy for a long time. She does anything she's told to do when she's under the influence. But it was easy with her—she was an addict already.

"Sure, she took Whizzer his cigars. I figured I could use him someday. He told me plenty about BMEWS, almost everything I wanted to know. He's handy, as long as he keeps smoking.

"Pat Lester used to be one of us. It was her job to deliver certain information to the right parties. But she became careless. Your people suspected her and it means the end of an agent's usefulness to be suspected. I

thought Larry had taken her place until his letter was intercepted. Those dollar bills were blank. After Whizzer went through his billfold that night on the chance he still had the bill, and found nothing, I knew that Larry was a decoy and had trapped us."

"What did Nancy do to Pat?" Sherry's eyes narrowed.

"Why nothing. Pat ran out of cigarettes so Nancy gave her a couple of my special brand to smoke on her way home. They make you sleep well and leave no trace in the bloodstream."

As Bob spoke I saw Nancy sway and blink several times, and gradual recognition come into her eyes.

"Bob, what's happening, what are you doing? I've got an awful headache," Nancy moaned and tried to push Roberta away.

"She's been using you, Nancy, using you to do terrible things," I told her.

"I've been having some miserable dreams," Nancy shuddered and shrank from the knife.

"Hey, you oughta see the funny looking boat out there," the voice of one of the rock and roll kids called and the door to the tiny cabin burst open unceremoniously hitting Bob squarely in the back.

With a grunt she was thrown against Nancy, who fell against Sherry, who piled on top of the little Captain. They all went down in a squirming heap dragging Whizzer from the edge of my bunk. Furiously Bob extracted herself from the tangled human knot and struggled to her feet, the knife still in her hand. She was ready to jump the long-haired kid standing open-mouthed in the doorway.

Throwing the covers off I amazed myself at the speed with which I grabbed the back of her parka and pulled her sharply over against the bunk twisting the knife from her hand. She was as strong as a man and I don't know how long I'd have been able to hold her if the Captain hadn't gotten to his feet just then and helped subdue her. He and Whizzer locked her in the closest storage closet until the tug docked.

"Gee—gee," was all the kid in the doorway could say.

"Like kicksville, man," I told him, then sank back on the bunk exhausted.

Sherry sent everyone out of the cabin again and closed the door so I could rest.

"That is an odd looking

boat," she remarked as she stared out of a porthole. "It's hurrying away from us. Maybe it was supposed to pick up Roberta. Maybe she even planned to sabotage the tug, who knows? Anyway you'll still be around to put a downpayment on that little bar you wanted."

"How did you know—?"

"It's my business to know everything. Would you consider having a partner? Well, don't look so surprised, I'm about ready to settle down, too. I'm not as young as I look, but don't tell anyone."

I smiled and nodded, half asleep, as she kissed me.

THE CASE OF THE BROWN PAPER PARCEL

Mr. Philip Kindersley, stockbroker, company director, and younger brother of Lord Kindersley, chairman of Rolls-Royce, received a parcel in London this past winter.

The parcel, posted in Threadneedle Street, was addressed to him at the London office of a firm with which he is not connected—the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa, consulting engineers to the De Beers group. Inside the parcel were 1,200 Five Pound notes, and this unsigned note:

"Herewith £ 6,000 in cash which to the sender's knowledge is the property of De Beers' Company of South Africa but is sent to you in good faith."

De Beers are described as having "no knowledge of any money owing to them which would be repaid in so anonymous and devious a manner." And Mr. Kindersley, who turned the money over to the police, could not understand why he of all people had been sent the parcel.

Readers of this magazine will no doubt agree with me that it is interesting to speculate on how far back in time records would have to be checked before it could be said categorically, as De Beers did, that they had no knowledge of any money owing to them which would be repaid in such a strange manner.

It is of course possible that there *is* no record of this amount being owed them. Many things must have happened on the Rand, in the old days, about which there are no "records", in the sense that the word is understood in our more computerized times.

H.S.S.

a kind of murder

by Morris Hershman

Stan Lodge said, "Tell me what's wrong, Aunt Clara. You're going to do it sooner or later, you know."

Aunt Clara, having inspected the restaurant appointments to make sure that they met with her high standards as a homemaker, sighed loudly. She was in her fifties, and once a month she'd come up to San Francisco to see her nephew.

"I don't suppose it really amounts to much," she began thoughtfully. "Living in a small town does give you rather a small view of the world. Sometimes there seems to be no world at all outside the kitchen. I've been living in Keenwoode for eight years now, long before your Uncle James passed away. I've always kept to myself with strangers and not made any difficulties."

Stan waited patiently. As a man who owned his business, he could get back to work at whatever time he chose.

Novelist Morris Hershman returns with this story about Aunt Clara's neighbors, The Vedovas, and their problems. All this will perhaps suggest some disturbing possibilities and, in time, you may of course find yourself wondering about those neighbors whom you used to hear most evenings...

"Do you remember my friend, Mrs. Thorwald?" Aunt Clara continued. "I've mentioned her very often. We were always exchanging recipes and practically living in each other's pockets. Well, Joe Thorwald retired and took Minna out to live in some community for *old* people. The house was bought by a younger couple named Vedova. She's a very absent-minded housewife, I must say. She does all the right things, but *badly*, you know. She has no heart for woman's work. Most of the younger ones don't care for it nowadays, which is very foolish of them."

"I suppose you don't get along with the new woman," Stan said calmly.

"She's not the one who makes the trouble, dear. It's her husband, Mr. Vedova. He doesn't get along with anybody. I've heard him argue with his wife in the morning, noon and night. I'm sure he's even hurt her once or twice. I could hear the thock! sound against flesh and bone, you know. It's hard to mistake, almost like when the butcher chops a piece of meat for you and—"

"I get the point," Stan said quickly.

"Once the woman came to my house to borrow something she was out of—flour or sugar? Flour, yes, I remember because I was starting a cake—well, never mind that. The man stood in their doorway and yelled at her as she came back. He yelled at me, too, for having given her the flour. I could see the veins standing out on his head. He was completely irrational. He sounded dangerous."

"I'm sure he's apologized for it by now," Stan said comfortingly. "I can't imagine why anybody would want to keep up a feud with you."

"That's kind of you, dear, but Vedova *did* want to keep it up. When I saw him in the shopping center a few days later, he got angry and started to shout at me. When his wife got between us and pleaded with him to quiet down, he did. A week ago he saw me coming home and I swear he was going to run toward me, but his wife managed to get him into the house. I could hear him shouting, though, and I really expected him to come after me."

"You've got a problem, all right," Stan agreed reluctantly. "Have you gone to the police?"

Aunt Clara looked confused. "The police? Why, I wouldn't know what to do or

who to see or what to tell them."

He sighed. Aunt Clara considered herself thoroughly helpless outside the household and especially the kitchen.

"Do you want me to take care of it for you?"

"Dear, I don't know what you'd tell them. After all, Vedova has been absolutely quiet for a week now, ever since that last incident. It's disturbing to recall the matter, of course, but I did say before that I didn't really think it amounts to much."

Stan was perplexed. "How do you mean, 'absolutely quiet'?"

"He sits in the garden, wearing colored glasses and smoking a cigar as if he suddenly loved the whole world. When he sees me coming out to hang up clothes or some such, he smiles and sometimes he waves. Believe me, dear, it *is* unnerving."

"Yes, it might very well be," Stan agreed. "How does Mrs. Vedova take the change?"

"I've only seen her twice in the last few weeks, dear, and I thought she was as confused as I am. She kept *staring* at him, you know, as if she can't figure it out either. It could be that he's biding his time before—well, I'm being an old woman."

Stan looked pensive. He genuinely liked his aunt and didn't want to see her disturbed. Besides, a change of activity might take his mind off his current business difficulty. He made a living out of the manufacture and sale of nickel alloy "cartwheels" to Nevada gambling houses. Business would have been much better if a new rival named Joseph Amenhorn wasn't undercutting his prices and using strong-arm tactics among some of Stan's people. He didn't know quite how to handle such a matter. Toughness in return was completely alien to his nature.

"If you want me to look into it, Aunt Clara," he said, thinking that a personal visit to the Vedovas might help him size them up, "I'll do it. I don't suppose you've got anything to worry about, though."...

The small town of Keenwoode appeared shortly after he drove past the other side of the Golden Gate bridge and passed a shopping center. The houses looked like each other, and so did the women and children. They were as much alike as the nickel alloy cartwheels Stan manufactured, only there was no Nevada gambling casino

name printed across their faces. And perhaps there was no Joseph Amenhorn to take illegal advantages everywhere.

There was a shiny bread-loaf mailbox near the curb at Maple Drive, and there was an aluminum chair and wooden table at the right, just like in the other places he had passed. The house itself was a one-story job with a huge picture window facing the road.

Stan walked up to the door and rang the bell vigorously. Footsteps padded towards him from the other side.

The door opened on a woman in the early thirties. She wore a high-neck black dress, and her dark hair were in a bun on the back of her head. Her thick brows lifted inquiringly at sight of him.

Stan gave a reassuring smile. "I'd like to see Mr. Vedova, please. It's a business matter."

"Come in, please." The shiny gold ring on the third finger of her left hand caught a glint of late afternoon sunlight. "I'll see if my husband is—well, I'll see. And your name?"

Stan gave it. He walked through the narrow and lightly furnished hallway into the living room. The framed photograph in a cabinet against the north wall showed Mrs. Vedova and her husband in their wedding outfits. The man was a big bruiser whose thick eyebrows were set in a near-frown, and he looked as if he was going to jump out of the frame and assault Stan for having looked at him.

Stan turned at the sound of a man's footsteps. The original of the photograph was coming toward him.

"Mr. Vedova?" Stan was poised for trouble.

"That's right, Lodge." Vedova affably extended a hand, and Stan started to give his maximum grip before realizing with shock that Vedova was extending no return pressure. "How about a drink?"

"Thanks, no. It's too early for me."

He sat down slowly near the edge of a barber-pole-striped couch. Never before had he been so puzzled. He had expected to meet a hard-fisted man like his business rival Joseph Amenhorn, and instead this fellow was easy-going and mild-mannered. This man couldn't ever have threatened Aunt Clara. Or could he indeed be playing some dark game of his own?

Stan claimed in an off-handed way that he was selling burglary insurance. Ve-

dova cordially promised to consider even a proposition as deliberately vague and calculated to arouse suspicion and aggressiveness as Stan's was. In return he soon talked about his own business.

"Women's clothing is my line," he said. "It's always been a rough game with a thousand midgets clawing each other's eyes out, but now the business is shaking down to a few giants. I'd been angling to become one of the giants, but lately I keep asking myself if I shouldn't sell out and take these things a whole lot easier."

An explanation occurred to Stan for what had been bothering him. "Have you got a health problem? Has a doctor been telling you lately to take it easy?"

"Nothing like it! Walt says that except for one minor difficulty I'm as sound as a pre-inflation, pre-tax dollar." Vedova smiled gently, remembering his doctor's attempt at humor. It's just that I'm starting to wonder if the rat race is worth while. 'Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers', and so forth. What do you think, Stan?"

He had pried Stan's first name out of him during the discussion.

"People ought to live as long and comfortably as possible," Stan said with care. "This looks like a nice town and you can take it easy if your neighbors are all right."

"They're fine," Vedova said pleasantly, walking Stan to the door. "I've had some discussion with the older woman in the next house and I'm afraid I lost my temper, but she's very pleasant. I only hope I can get up the nerve to apologize."

He insisted on shaking hands again before a bewildered Stan could leave, carrying with him a spoken invitation to return at any time. On the way out of the house he ran into Mrs. Vedova coming back. She flinched at sight of him.

"Did you and my husband get along?" she asked cautiously. "I hope my husband didn't forget himself."

"We got along fine," Stan said. "Isn't your husband always like this?"

"Of course," Mrs. Vedova said mechanically, but Stan noticed her hand rise up to the high-necked dress. Probably she was hiding scars from previous encounters with the man inside the house.

He said carefully, "Mr. Vedova seems in good health

and seems to be enjoying his life."

The woman might have been talking to herself rather than responding to Stan. "I've asked Walt about the change and he says it's nothing to worry over. But if it isn't it should be! After all, there's been such a complete—"

She stopped herself, blinking in confusion.

"Is that right?" Stan asked thoughtfully. "I suppose that Walt is the family doctor."

"Yes. And my brother-in-law as well. You make intelligent guesses, Mr. Lodge."

"Here's another one," Stan said. "I'd guess that your husband has recently bought colored glasses."

"As a matter of fact he did, and he'd never wear them before. How did you know that?"

"Because it occurred to me that colored glasses are supposed to hide a person's real emotional state, almost like a mask does; but colored glasses are as likely to give away what a man really thinks and how he feels and who he is as a person."

"I don't understand what you're saying."

Stan merely smiled and said, "Goodbye, Mrs. Vedova —and thanks for the hospitality."

Stan threw a glance toward his aunt's house as he was leaving and decided to phone her afterwards and tell her to take things easy and not worry. It would certainly calm her down in any case. Aunt Clara probably hadn't arrived at home yet, if she had done some shopping in town and planned to return by bus, which was her usual schedule when she got to San Francisco....

Dr. Walter Vedova had a practice in the Berkeley area, as a look in the phone book told Stan. A call confirmed that office hours didn't begin for the doctor in the evening until six o'clock. There was plenty of time to pay the man a visit, as Stan had now decided he was going to do.

He put through a call to his factory as well during the next few minutes, learning that his rival, Joseph Amenhorn, had arranged for one of Stan's Las Vegas salesmen to sustain a bad beating. Stan cursed Amenhorn thoroughly, and wished he himself was the type who could break another man's fat damn neck for him. Or could pay somebody else to do it. No, that sort of thing wasn't in his character, damn it, in spite of Amenhorn's criminal activities.

He wrote a few words on

one of his business cards shortly after arriving at Dr. Walter Vedova's office. He was soon admitted. The doctor turned out to be a sharp-featured man with thick but well-cared-for hands. He reminded Stan of his brother, but was definitely younger.

"I assume that nothing is wrong with my brother and his wife or they'd have been in touch with me personally."

"Something has been wrong for a week, doctor," Stan said deliberately. In the few possible words he told about his aunt's story of threatened violence and then about his visit to a man who seemed at peace with the whole world.

Dr. Vedova said, "Some people become smarter as they get older. It seems as if my brother is one of them."

"Do you claim that he's behaving naturally?"

"Let me give you some few facts you may not have obtained, Mr.—um, Lodge. My brother has made his own life desperately unhappy over a long period of time. Often he's been in danger of arrest for some of his actions. Only last week he had a violent run-in with your aunt, as you said, and I'm sure she's perfectly harmless. If this had continued, Mr. Lodge, he would soon have been imprisoned in a state institution of one sort or another."

"So you reasoned with him," Stan said easily, "and he saw the light. Anybody would believe that, doctor."

Dr. Vedova's back was rigid. "I don't know what business this is of yours or why you should come here in the first place. I'll have to ask you to leave or I'll call the police. If I'm not mistaken, a man in your profession won't be in such a good position once I make that call."

"You won't do it," Stan said with the practiced ease of a man who was himself a born gambler. "First of all, you have to find out exactly how much I know about what's been happening. Doctor, I know everything."

Dr. Vedova had picked up the phone.

Stan said, "One more minute of talk ought to convince you I'm not fooling."

With all but one digit of the police number dialled, the doctor looked up.

Stan said quickly, "Your brother told me that you've been treating him for some minor trouble. That treatment must have started a week ago, just after Mrs. Vedova called you to say your brother had been violent once again. You knew that the

worst might very well happen unless you went against the law. Isn't that true, doctor?"

"Whatever you say, I deny it."

"Sure. All the same, you gave your brother some pills for that 'minor trouble'. Your brother has been calm and contented ever since. In that case, the pills are what have calmed down, and you're not at all surprised it's happened. Your sister-in-law told me as much, and that's when I knew I was going to drop over and see you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes indeed, doctor. You've doped your brother, of course, probably with a derivative of morphine; it dilates the pupils and hurts the victim, you know, and during this last week your brother bought colored glasses for the first time in his life. That's significant, under the circumstances."

Dr. Vedova sighed softly and replaced the phone. "How much money do you want?"

"Not a penny, doctor. What's more, I'll admit to you right now that I've got no intention of telling any medical licensing board what you've done. An investigation would ruin you and I've got no stomach for that. I don't know but that if I were in your situation I might not do exactly the same thing and kill a man's personality without that man's consent. It's murder, in a way, but I haven't got it in me to blame you as much as I wish I could."

"In that case," Vedova said carefully, "we have nothing more to talk about. You've satisfied your curiosity and that's the end of it."

"One point of information, doctor," Stan said, unmoving. "I suppose you can make arrangements for your brother to keep getting that stuff under-the-counter, no matter what may happen to you. Is that right?"

Dr. Vedova nodded.

"Good. I'd hate to think of a man in his condition being stranded."

"Good *night*, Mr. Lodge."

"Just one more thing, doctor. I have an important problem of my own. I'm having business trouble with a thief and muscle artist named Joe Amenhorn and, as a favor, I'd like you to work on him." Stan was smiling coolly as he stood up at last. "I'll get in touch during the week so we can make arrangements. After all, you've got an office full of sick people and I certainly don't want to keep you from your practice."

Continued from other side)

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